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After You, Marco Polo JEAN BOWIE SHOR

Heritage ANTHONY WEST

So Near and Yet So Far EMILY KIMBROUGH

The Smiling Rebel HARNETT T. KANE

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# After You, MAR(I) PIL

## Jean Bowie Shor

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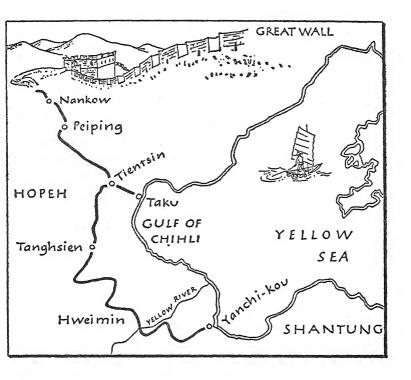
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#### The Author

JEAN BOWIE SHOR led a peripatetic life even before she became Mrs. Franc Shor. In 1944-45 she was in Africa and Italy with the American Red Cross. The following year she went to China to do personnel work for UNRRA and in 1948 she met Franc Shor in Shanghai. Since "the Marco Polo trip," the Shors have been traveling for the National Geographic, and have visited most of the Middle East and all of Europe.



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### I

#### AMARILLO TO SHANGHAI

THERE IS A PASS across the High Pamirs, in the region called Wakhan. It is dangerous, and eerie, and awful. Marco Polo crossed that pass, and so did I. And one night I stood watch in a rude rock shelter on a snow field under the 20,000-foot summit while my husband, Franc, raved in fever.

I knew that he was probably dying, and in his lucid moments he knew it too. In an atmosphere so thin that every movement required painful exertion of will and body, I gathered yak dung for our guttering fire. I melted snow and cajoled him to drink, and I bathed his parched skin.

The candle, flickering low, was our last. I adjusted it so the light would not shine in Franc's eyes, but would be reflected on

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#### JEAN BOWIE SHOR

the broad, brooding faces of our Kirghiz yak pullers. They gave me no help, only watched intently. I knew they were waiting for Franc to die, hoping he would die quickly, so that they could desert us.

Franc's temperature passed 105, almost certainly fatal at such an altitude. He became delirious and struggled to get out of his sleeping bag. He said he was going back to the pass. He is a big man, but I tied him in the bag, and sat on him until he slept.

At dawn, exhausted, I crawled through the door of the abandoned sheep fold in which we had found refuge, and looked out upon the march of ice-helmeted stone giants ringing us, and asked myself a question. I asked it aloud:

"Jean Bowie Shor, what are you doing here?"

My heart knew the answer. I had persuaded my husband to embark with me upon an impossible adventure. I had dreamed of following the footsteps of Marco Polo, for many years a hero to me, on his immortal journey from Venice to China. I wanted to follow Marco Polo's footsteps exactly, across the Middle East, Central Asia, and the Roof of the World.

Everyone had said that we couldn't make it, not in the middle years of the twentieth century. Travel had been simpler in the thirteenth century, when visas were unnecessary and there wasn't so much suspicion and fear on the border roads between East and West. Marco Polo had traveled with the blessings of a pope, the sanction of princes, and under the protection of the Golden Tablet of Kublai Khan. We possessed a plain American passport, in a day when Americans were not everywhere welcome.

The expedition seemed impossible for a physical reason as well—what geographers call the Pamir Knot. Imagine that a giant confined inside the earth in Central Asia had struck an angry blow against his round prison, so that his fist raised a great plateau, and his knuckles twisted peaks. In this convulsion were created the Hindu Kush and the Karakoram, to jostle the mighty Himalayas. Here is the Pamir Knot. Here Russia, Afghanistan, China, and Pakistan meet but do not merge.

Struggling toward Cathay, Marco Polo had traversed the

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Wakhan to reach the Pamirs. Franc had talked with awe of this treacherous corridor. Few Europeans, and no woman, had ever attempted it. If we crossed successfully, we would be the first Westerners to go through the Wakhan in 110 years. Expeditions backed by governments, possessing elaborate equipment and unlimited funds, had been turned back. The odds were forbiddingly heavy against our succeeding.

I had been stubborn, insistent. The responsibility was mine. My fault that we were trapped in this savage place. I was afraid, and more than afraid. I was guilty.

MY CAREER AS a nomad began, I believe, at the age of five. I loaded my little red wagon with apples, cookies, and my favorite doll, and found my way to the house of a relative, ten unfamiliar blocks away. When I started to read, I skipped the books that little girls usually like, and began early to concentrate on the far places. I read every history of Asia and Europe I could lay my hands on. With wonder, I consumed Mark Twain's *Innocents Abroad*, and Sven Hedin's accounts of his travels in Asia. I read Cellini, Leonardo da Vinci, and the history of the Borgias. But above all else, I was enthralled by the adventures of Marco Polo. The itinerary of Marco Polo I could recite like a train schedule, and it was Marco Polo who taught me respect for maps.

My first trip abroad was a wonderful carefree, prewar unconducted tour. An aunt from Connecticut—everyone should have one!—sent me a check for \$1,000 with a note saying that "it is about time you see Europe." I left a week later while the family was still trying to decide if it was all right for me to go alone. The summer and autumn of 1938, I stretched that \$1,000 to the vanishing point, begrudgingly parting with my pennies in London's Soho, in Paris where I discovered *lapin* meant rabbit and you could eat it, in Berlin where I caught a frightening glimpse of Hitler meeting Admiral Horthy in a city eerily floodlit in green. I stretched it through Hungary and Italy and Holland. My pocketbook and my feet took an awful beating. Everywhere

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I traveled third class, or no class at all, wide-eyed, incredulous, and certain that I had found my profession, traveling.

As it turned out, the U. S. Government took the responsibility for my second safari out of my aunt's hands. Soon after the United States entered World War II, I joined the American Red Cross and asked for overseas duty. My life in far-off places began—with a vengeance.

I was assigned to the 306th Fighter Wing of the 15th Air Force, based on the Adriatic side of Italy. The mission of the wing was to protect the heavy bombers that struck each day into Germany and Central Europe. My mission was to command a clubmobile, and serve doughnuts and coffee to the fighter pilots and their ground crews on two adjoining airfields.

I saw the first missions off before dawn every morning, and welcomed the last ones home in late afternoon. I delivered and distributed some three thousand doughnuts a day on the bases, altogether handing out more than a million.

When the war was over on both fronts, I resigned from the Red Cross, but by then my foot was definitely "in the path." The world of Marco Polo lay to the east, in Asia. In 1946 I took a job with UNRRA in China and went to work as an administrative assistant in Shanghai.

Postwar Shanghai was a city of skyrocketing prices and worthless currency and chain cocktail parties and wild rumors. Incredible luxury and unbelievable squalor lived side by side. Everyone assured everyone else that Shanghai's future was bright, that things were going to be all right, but nobody really believed it. The shadow of doom lay over the city.

The next year, in 1947, I was transferred briefly to Peiping, and the old capital, so rich in history, was a relief from Shanghai's pace. Yet Peiping was like a city resting in the eye of a hurricane, for in the north the Communist guerrilla bands crept ever closer. While the merchants and officials of Peiping ardently talked the Nationalist cause, they felt the first breath of the red storm upon their necks.

#### AFTER YOU, MARCO POLO

I tried to do my job and keep out of political discussions, for UNRRA was an international agency employing citizens of every country. I knew that our task, attempting to dole out relief to both sides, Nationalist and Communist, was almost hopeless. Bringing relief to graft-ridden, divided China was like pouring sugar into the sea.

Peiping is one of the oldest cities continuously inhabited by man, founded in 3000 B.C., according to legend. It is, to me, the most beautiful spot in the world. I tramped through the Forbidden City where the Manchus ruled, and looked upon the Temple of Heaven, and inspected the Ming tombs, and passed between the kneeling stone camels of the Alley of Animals.

Standing in the main bazaar of the Thieves Market one afternoon, I looked up to see a long camel caravan just entering the Great Western Gate. The shaggy Bactrian camels, with deeptoned bells hanging from their necks, led by traders in tattered sheepskins and leather leggings, suddenly typified for me all the mystery of the desert and the ageless romance of the East.

My mind skipped quickly to another ageless trademark of China's past and, then and there, I determined to see it—the Great Wall.

The Americans in Peiping advised me not to try. The Great Wall is not far from the city, at Nankow Pass, perhaps four hours by train, but all the railroads in North China were now in danger. The Communist bands blew up a train or trestle almost every night. Wise travelers rode the trains only in the daylight hours.

Not long afterward, I met a Chinese named Chou, a slight and delicate man of dignified expression and courtly manners. Chou had been a guide for Thomas Cook, and therefore possessed great face among all the guides of Peiping. He lamented that now there were no more American or British tourists, and that it was well known that the Russian tourists were not really tourists at all.

This was an opportunity too good to be missed. "How would you like to escort me on a Cook's tour?" I asked.

"Where would you like to go?" he said, beaming.

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"To the Great Wall."

Mr. Chou came only to my shoulder, and at five seven I am not exactly an Amazon. Now he seemed to shrink even smaller. "Once—" he said wistfully. "But now, you know it is impossible. The Reds—the bandits—they keep blowing up the train."

"I would pay very well," I said. He stood quietly for a moment. I could see him weighing the danger against the need of rice for his table. I might be the last American tourist he would ever see; yet this innocent sight-seeing jaunt might end in sudden death.

Without a change of expression he made his decision. "There is a work train that daily goes beyond the Wall at Nankow," he said. "The bandits do not blow it up because they do not consider it worthwhile, or perhaps because some of their own kind ride it, disguised as laborers. If you meet me at three o'clock in the morning at the station—"

I met him at the station at this furtive hour, looking as rugged as I could manage in suntan khaki shirt and trousers, and GI shoes. We each carried our lunch, his wrapped in a white silk handkerchief, mine in a paper carton.

Soon a string of flatcars was shoved up the track. "This is our train," Chou announced. "Please board, missy." On our car, their legs dangling over the side, were some twenty blue-clad laborers, friendly and inquisitive gents who inspected me curiously and smiled.

We rode the train to where the railroad penetrates the Great Wall, at Nankow Pass, jumped off at the summit of the pass, and climbed to the top section of the Wall running west.

The wall snaked across the gray earth and blue rocks as far as one could see. I scrambled over several miles of its broad top, examined stairways and sentry boxes, skinned my hands and knees, and congratulated myself that I had been lucky enough to see the most monumental work ever conceived by man. The Great Wall makes the Pyramids, as well as such modern pygmies as Boulder Dam and the Empire State Building, seem undersized and puny indeed. With all its turns and loops, its length is over 1.500 miles.

It was started, some say, five hundred years before the birth of Christ and it was generations a-building. In 220 B.C. all its works were linked by the Emperor Ch'in Shih Huang, who, Chou told me, expended the lives of 500,000 criminals and prisoners of war in the process. Later construction was done in the Ming dynasty (A.D. 1368–1644). Cathay was protected by this single fortification from the Yellow Sea to the great deserts beyond Yumen in Kansu. Watchers were stationed on every turret and tower, day and night. They used a code of smoke signals to summon help when the savage horsemen of Mongolia massed against the Wall. So, for a time, the barbarians were held off, but in the end the Great Wall proved about as useful as its pathetic latter-day imitator, the Maginot Line.

We were back at the pass well before the train was due. Farmers with baskets of garlic waited along the track. We would have more passengers going back to Peiping than coming out. Then a whisper ran through the farmers lining the track and was heard by Chou. "Our train," he explained calmly, "has been blown up on the other side of the pass."

Before I had a chance to worry over it, he smiled and said, "It is really not so serious, missy. It was a mistake. The bandits undoubtedly intended to blow up an express train, but unfortunately the express train was delayed."

"What's not so serious about that?" I asked.

"The engine itself will not have been hurt, for it always pushes several empty flatcars ahead, as a safety measure against just such a stupid mistake. Surely another work train is being assembled north of the pass, and the tracks have been repaired. It will arrive presently."

"Presently," in Chinese, can mean almost any length of time short of a century, and it was almost dawn when the new work train chugged up the pass and wheezed to a stop.

The ride back to Peiping was uneventful. Mr. Chou came to my house a few nights later and very formally presented me with a heavy sheet of Chinese paper, lined vertically. Written in beautiful Chinese characters, it established my bona fides: "This is to certify that Miss Jean Bowie has made a visit to the Great

Wall of China, escorted by Guide Precious North Chou, formerly of Thomas Cook."

I have it still. I doubt that Mr. Chou ever escorted another tourist. Indeed, I may have been the last Western tourist to visit the Great Wall for a long, long time, as we measure time, but not as time is measured by the Great Wall.

It was the duty of UNRRA to distribute relief supplies to both Nationalists and Communists, in proportion to the population of the areas devastated by the Japanese. At that time eighty per cent of the population was in areas controlled by the Nationalists, and so they received eighty per cent of all relief supplies. Since the Nationalists controlled all the ports, they could screen supplies destined for the Communists. Quite rightly, they insisted that no supplies which might be converted to military use be sent the Communists. Somehow, almost everything, from sewing machines to dentists' drills, developed a military potential.

Nevertheless, it was the duty of UNRRA to see that the Communists received their share, or as much of their share as could be convoyed to them. It was not up to us to decide policy. Our job was to carry out the orders of the governments, including the United States, that framed the UNRRA Charter.

Since there was constant fighting in the north, every shipment that went into Communist areas required the equivalent of a private treaty between the two forces and had to be accompanied by Nationalist and Communist liaison officers, and UNRRA personnel. I wanted desperately to make a trip on one of these convoys, to see what life was like on the other side of the lines. In 1947, the shape of the enemy was still hazy. I begged and pleaded to go into Communist territory with an UNRRA team. Finally, my superiors were worn down, and they granted permission.

The convoy to which I was assigned formed up at Tientsin. It was to carry relief supplies down the Grand Canal, by barge, to the destitute millions in the Communist-held areas of Hopeh and Shantung Provinces. In the group were four UNRRA repre-

sentatives besides myself, three newspaper correspondents, and the Nationalist and Communist liaison officers, two young men who maintained a precise degree of politeness to everyone, but managed not to be aware of each other's presence.

From Tientsin we went a day's ride south by train, transferred to jeeps, and drove another day to the town of Tsangshien where we boarded the barges. The barges were loaded with useless sewing-machine treadles, dried-soup powder, tinned British biscuits, and dental plaster of Paris. I was too accustomed to such insanity to ask any questions.

Twenty coolies, dressed in faded blue cotton and straw hats big as parasols, pulled each barge. They chanted as they tugged, each with a long rope biting into his shoulders. The countryside seemed oddly peaceful, despite soldiers on the move, deserted slit trenches, and isolated pillboxes, some of them scorched. I was told that whenever an UNRRA team passed through the lines, both sides declared a local truce. No trouble was anticipated. Other convoys had preceded us.

That afternoon I heard what sounded like a thunderstorm behind us, although the sky was not clouded. In the evening, just before we tied up at a small squalid village, the thunder was accompanied by flashes of lightning. The Nationalist liaison officer, who had become quieter with every additional mile we penetrated into Communist territory, now seemed downright frightened. My thunder and lightning was a battle in progress back in Tsangshien.

There was a reception committee on the bank to greet us, headed by a tall, wide-shouldered, handsome man wearing a military jacket and trousers of tan homespun cotton. He was the local commissar, and he made a speech. He was delighted, he said, to have us as his guests. Unfortunately, it would be dangerous for us to go on. There might be fighting ahead. However, he was sure our stay in the village would be pleasant. He would be host at a feast that night, and we would be comfortably billeted in a motor-pool compound.

True to his word, the commissar gave us a banquet. It was the most elaborate meal I ever had in China, with fifteen courses

washed down by cups of hot yellow wine, and including whole roast suckling pigs, duck, fish, roast chicken, and interspersed with such delicacies as melon soup, shark-fin soup, ancient buried eggs, and glutinous rice pudding. This was no spur-of-the-moment cookery—obviously, we had been expected for dinner.

We were, literally, fat and complacent that night when suddenly the party line changed. A squad of armed soldiers entered the compound. They said not a word, but moved ominously into our huts. I had a battery radio which a soldier savagely bayoneted. After a brief and violent search, they took away one of the correspondents, a photographer, while maintaining a guard over the rest of us.

The whole performance was crazy and illogical. We were bringing them supplies—not what they wanted, to be sure, but still all we could manage—and as a reward we were being treated like criminals. Gathering our wits and our nerve, we demanded to speak to the commissar, who only a few hours before had been so friendly. Now, he would not see us.

In the morning we were loaded aboard trucks, at gun muzzle, and driven south, deeper into Hopeh. We bounced along a dusty road all day, and in the evening came to the village of Hsiao Wang Chang. I climbed out of the truck, stretched, and looked up into the face of a hulking red-haired man whose eyes shone with excitement and contempt. This was my introduction to Dr. Frey, an Austrian physician, a Jewish refugee from the Nazis who had fled to China before the war. He had lived in the interior with his Chinese wife, there joining Mao Tse Tung, and becoming one of the foreign political advisers to the Chinese Communists in what he termed the "liberated areas."

We would, Dr. Frey informed us in perfect English, be under his control so long as we remained in Hsiao Wang Chang.

"How long will that be?" I asked.

"It depends," he said. "But perhaps while you are here, I can add something to your education."

I shrugged. This would be a new type of "education." The man was obviously a fanatic.



The tenants of one of the compounds were evicted so we could be housed. The house consisted of one large room, its floor a hardened paste of ox blood and mud. Along one side of the room was a large kang, or built-in bed. This is simply a mud platform raised above floor level. A flue from an outdoor fireplace is buried under it, so that in winter the kang is heated. This Chinese equivalent of an electric blanket plus radiant heat is crude, but it works.

After the first week, each day dragged by like a month, and I had the horrible feeling that we had never been missed by UNRRA and were destined to live on in that village compound forever.

Every night the towering Dr. Frey favored us with a political lecture. At first we tried to argue with this mind locked in Communist dogma, but he automatically rejected even the simplest and best-known facts of history. He could, however, be needled. "Is it true," I asked innocently one night, "that Stalin and Chiang are about to sign a nonaggression pact?"

His whole face turned the color of his hair, as he denounced the rumor as impossible.

"Well," one of the correspondents joined in the game, "Stalin signed a pact with Hitler, didn't he?"

And Dr. Frey became apoplectic, as we tried not to laugh aloud.

After a time the political lectures and the baiting of Dr. Frey began to grow tiresome, and when he spoke of Wall Street we wouldn't answer. Instead my mind would wander on over to Fifth Avenue and the chic girls in front of Saks's or Bonwit Teller's. How strange I would have looked to them! . . . Frey had begun to beat us down, by constant ranting, and we knew that answering only made him rage and scream the longer.

Now we call this technique, developed to a finer science, "brain-washing," and we know that when carried on for months or years it can pound to a jelly even the mind of a courageous and stubborn person. Dr. Frey didn't have that long to work on us, but even if he had, I prefer to think that his verbal bludgeoning would not have been effective. He was a bitter man,

so filled with poison and hatred that his infection was plain. He hated everyone, including, no doubt, himself.

In our third week of captivity we were told that negotiations were under way for our release. UNRRA had not forgotten us! A few days later we knew the party line had switched again. Our guards became jolly and polite. Dr. Frey smiled, for the first time, and announced that the Communist governor was to entertain us at dinner. We knew that UNRRA must have reached some agreement with the Communist hierarchy.

The governor's banquet was held at a military post near the village. My hands appeared so coarse and the dirt was so deeply ingrained that I hesitated to touch the linen napkins or the tablecloth. The beautiful silver seemed difficult to manipulate after a month of chopsticks. Surprisingly, we were served a complete Western-style dinner, cooked and served by the governor's kitchen staff, brought a hundred miles for the occasion.

During the course of the conversation that night we heard the first news in a month of what had been going on in the world outside our village prison. For one thing, the United States was supplying new arms to the Nationalists. One of the Communist officers observed, "That is a very good thing. We will capture it all very quickly."

I couldn't guess that his prediction would prove so right, so soon, and that our own guns would be turned against us in Korea.

After five nights of traveling in an American six-by-six truck which already had fallen into Communist hands, we arrived at the coastal city of Yanchi-kou. An LST, converted to an UNRRA supply ship, was on the way, we were told. The LST could not enter the shallow harbor, but we would go out in junks and meet it.

Two days later we were told that the LST was approaching the coast. We rushed down to the wharf, where motor junks waited to carry us to our rendezvous. Slowly the superstructure of our ship arose out of the sea. Then we heard a disquieting sound—heavy machine guns, far off. Three planes fell out of



the sky like plummeting hawks to attack our ship. The LST turned broadside to us, and then it put on speed and fled.

We sat on the wharf for a long time, stunned, before our Communist guards herded us back to our room. "You see," they said, "the treacherous running dogs of Chiang Kai-shek have attacked your UNRRA ship."

We did not believe it, then, but later discovered it was true. While the Nationalists had agreed, in principle, to allow certain UNRRA supplies to reach the Communists, they did everything possible to see that this didn't happen. On three different occasions to my knowledge, LSTs operated by the international relief agency were attacked by Nationalist planes.

It was now necessary, as we later found out, to reopen negotiations for our delivery all over again. Several days later we were again escorted to the docks. Once more we saw an LST approach, but this time it anchored far off shore. We boarded the junks, which for some reason were loaded with bales of cotton, and dripping and shivering from the spray that broke over the heavily laden craft, we at last climbed up cargo nets to the deck of the LST. (The cotton was unloaded, right after us. What sort of a private deal took place I'll never know.) That first night at sea, while we were eating supper aboard, someone ransacked my cabin and stole most of my clothes and all my money. I returned to Tientsin penniless and ragged and bugbitten as any refugee.

But I had learned about the Chinese Communists—the hard way.

UNRRA REASSIGNED ME to Shanghai, where I lived in luxury at the Hotel Metropole until the agency was disbanded. Then I took a job as executive assistant to Dr. Chang Kia-Gnau, president of the Central Bank of China. The title sounded formidable, but mostly I ghosted the speeches he delivered before gatherings of American businessmen in Shanghai, and drafted the replies to his English-language correspondence.

On the evening of March 24, a date I have no trouble remem-

bering, I attended a large party at the home of Evert Barger, the distinguished British archeologist and geographer. There too was Franc Shor, China correspondent of the *Reader's Digest*, and formerly executive officer for UNRRA in China. I had met him before, of course, as had practically everyone else in Shanghai. He was a tall, big-boned, wide-shouldered ex-newspaperman and magazine writer.

Franc elbowed his way through the crowd. "Come have a drink with me," he called, "it's my birthday."

"You're in good company," I answered. "It's my birthday, too."

He showed marvelous tact and didn't ask my age. Having been in charge of all UNRRA personnel, he probably knew it anyway. He simply said, "Naturally we'll have to celebrate."

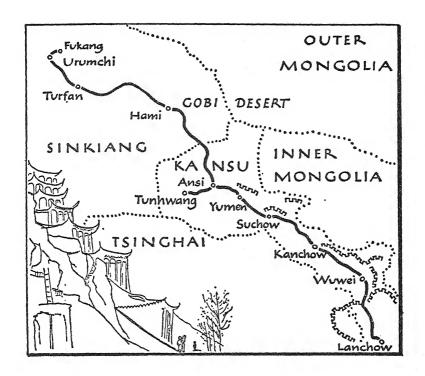
So we did, and all over Shanghai. By the time he took me back to the Metropole, at first light, I had learned a lot about Shanghai cabarets and night clubs and a great deal more about Franc Shor.

After that, we saw each other almost every night. We had much in common—mutual friends, similar interests, enthusiasm for our life abroad, and most of all a desire to travel. Franc had seen more of the world than I, and gallantly offered to fill in the gaps in my education. He spoke fluent Chinese, some French and German, and bits and pieces of Turkish, Turki, and Pashto. I spoke some Spanish, and was extremely fluent in sign language. We decided to merge our wanderlusts and our resources, and see the world. In short, we fell in love and got married.

We decided not to take a honeymoon until the pressure of Franc's writing eased. We had been married several months before Franc announced that he could get away. "Any place in China you'd like to go!" he said expansively. "Just pick it! Take a look at the map. Plenty of wonderful places within a day's flight—Peiping, Hongkong, Hangchow. State your pleasure."

He looked bewildered when I stated my pleasure. "Franc, let's cross the Gobi Desert!"





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#### HITCHHIKE ACROSS THE GOBI

I CHOSE THE GOBI for our honeymoon for many reasons, none of them very sensible.

Deserts had always fascinated me, and the Gobi is the mother of deserts. It lies across Central Asia like an enormous scimitar, 3,000 miles long and 1,200 miles broad, pocked by unpeopled depressions and warty with corroded mountains. Out of the Gobi came the Turkis, ancestors of the Hungarians, the Finns, and the Turks. The Gobi spawned the Mongol hordes that rallied to Genghis Khan. The Gobi bred conquerors who nourished on its shale, boulders, and shifting sands.

Few Americans or Western Europeans have crossed the Gobi, and I knew that if I were ever to make the journey it must be

then, for the darkness of Communism was closing in over all of China. We would not be the first Americans to cross the Gobi, but we might be the last for a long time.

Finally, Marco Polo, seeking the palaces of Kublai Khan in Cathay, had crossed the Gobi. I recalled what he had written about its wonders:

"It is a well-known fact that the desert is the abode of many evil spirits who amuse travelers to their destruction with most extraordinary illusions . . . If any person fall behind on the road, they unexpectedly hear themselves called by their names, and are lured from the direct road, and not knowing in what direction to advance, are left to perish . . . The spirits of the deserts at times fill the air with sounds of musical instruments and drums and the clash of arms, and compel the travelers to close their ranks . . . excessive troubles and dangers must unavoidably be encountered."

I wished to challenge Marco Polo's spirits and spooks.

Franc and I decided to fly as far into Central Asia as we could, then return overland, using whatever transportation was available. To put it bluntly, we would hitchhike back.

A war-weary C-46, with meat-grinder motors, made the run to Urumchi, the capital of Sinkiang Province (Chinese Turkestan) in extreme northwest China. Urumchi was the end of the line; beyond Urumchi lay Russia's land of the Kazaks. The air route skirted the Mongolian People's Republic.

This was a flight I am not likely to forget. We left Shanghai at four A.M. The plane's heating system wasn't working, nor was there so much as a cup of hot coffee aboard. Our pilot was a Canadian-born Chinese who had difficulty in understanding his Chinese passengers and called on Franc occasionally to interpret for him.

It was deep dusk when we bounced down on the tiny unlighted airfield at Urumchi, a city of 25,000, the hub of caravan routes and communications in that part of Asia. It possessed inns of a sort, of course, but we had been advised that G. Hall Paxton, the American consul, might put us up. At the consulate compound we were welcomed like old friends unexpectedly

come to visit, although neither the consul nor his wife had ever seen us before.

Urumchi was a pleasant city, little changed by the centuries, and the people were friendly. Flowers were everywhere. Giant cosmos, dahlias, and sunflowers glowed in the consulate compound. In the distance we could see some of the highest mountain ranges in the world, and to the east was the glacier-clad peak of Bogdo Ula, the sacred mountain of Turkestan.

There were no taxicabs in Urumchi, but the city had a rapid transit system that probably existed in Marco Polo's time. Buckboards drawn by shaggy ponies clattered along the cobbled streets from dawn until dark. You trotted alongside, bargained with the driver, and jumped aboard. When you reached a place that looked interesting, or which was near your destination, you jumped off. The trotting trolleys always followed the same route, as if on rails.

A foreigner expects to be gypped when he shops in China, but not so in Urumchi. In the shops of Shanghai and Canton crowds will gather to chortle at the sight of a foreigner being fleeced. Urumchi had seen very few Americans, and the legend that all such are laden with gold, and eager to throw it away, had not penetrated this far. A friendly group always followed us on our shopping tours, and they saw to it that we weren't cheated. When a merchant named his first price, the crowd would howl for his head. A delegation would take over the bargaining on our behalf. They would decide upon a fair price, and the irritated merchant would be forced to accept.

Franc wanted to spend a few days shooting ibex and wild boar in the mountains before we started across the Gobi. I shooed him off, for I sought a few days of solitude to browse through the Paxtons' impressive library, which included a fine collection of books on Asian exploration. I read the works of Peter Fleming, Georges le Fevre, Sir Eric Teichman, and Aurel Stein. I read Sven Hedin's thrilling account of the buried cities of Chinese Turkestan, and a book on the Caves of the Thousand Buddhas by Paul Pelliot, the Frenchman. I began to realize

what a fabulous area we were in, and how little we had seen!

By the time Franc returned from his hunting I was more fired up than ever about the return journey across the Gobi. We would have to make a side trip to visit the caves, I told him, and we would have to pause in Lanchow to find the grave of Genghis

Khan. And— I paused.

"And?" Franc eyed me good-humoredly.

"Did you know that Marco Polo passed through Sinkiang and Kansu on his way to Peiping?"

"Do we have to find his grave too?"

"Perhaps later." I showed off my vastly superior knowledge of history. "He was buried in Venice."

"Can't you enjoy the trip you're on," Franc said grinning, "unless you're planning the next one?" Thus Franc showed his vastly superior knowledge of me.

THE ANCIENT CARAVAN route that Marco Polo followed across the Gobi to Lanchow had been pounded and widened into a road. It was pocked with holes and cluttered with small-sized boulders, but usable. This arm of the Great Silk Road had linked two imperial civilizations, Persia and Cathay, while Europe was clambering out of barbarism and slumbering in the Dark Ages. Along this route, in Polo's time, were camel stations at regular intervals. Most of these were now ruins, or in disrepair, for silk no longer traveled west on ships of the desert. Although camel caravans still hauled much of the freight along this road, travelers were accommodated by a haphazard truck line operated by the provincial government. At odd intervals, mail and army trucks bumped over its rough surface.

On the morning of September 29, the Paxtons drove us to the Urumchi central motor compound and bade us good-by. As a farewell gift, they presented us with chopsticks, rice bowls, a packet of tea, and a teapot. "I think you will use these before you reach Lanchow," Hall said. It was the understatement of the year. We used them every day.

Our vehicle was a battered Studebaker truck, of wartime vintage, a survivor of the Burma Road. Since we were friends of the American consul, our stocky Chinese driver, Mr. Li, graciously invited us to ride in the cab, with the honored mail. We found space for our barracks and musette bags on top of the cab. The gun case, trench coats, teapot, cameras, and the bag of mail we held on our laps. The back of the truck was loaded with freight, gas and oil drums, and luggage, surmounted by six Chinese passengers and Mr. Kao, our mechanic.

A mile beyond Urumchi, and out of sight of officialdom, the truck ground to a stop and we were introduced to the Chinese custom of the "yellow fish." Gathered at the side of the road were fourteen new passengers, including a family of eight traveling with all its possessions. The "yellow fish" were those who preferred to pay the driver rather than the government ticket agent. This way the cost of the trip was less, and with a little extra squeeze they might even obtain the de luxe accommodations in the cab.

Mr. Li bargained with the "yellow fish," and when agreement was reached permitted them to pile their possessions and luggage aboard. I watched in amazement as they jammed two squealing pigs, a crate of chickens, and an assortment of bundles and bales upon the already overloaded truck. Then one man produced a bamboo ladder, constructed especially for this purpose, and they climbed to the top of the mound, jostling the legal customers into an indignant human mash behind the cab.

In all the 125 miles between Urumchi and Turfan there is no oasis, no waterhole. Rain is unknown. But the area surrounding the town of Turfan itself is fantastically fertile, the land watered by springs rising from underground rivers. These originate in the snows of the mountains ringing Urumchi, and in the glacier of the Bogdo Ula. They pass far beneath the Valley of the Demons, and issue in crystal loveliness and cold purity at Turfan.

In Turfan are grown the sweetest white grapes in the world, and there—where rain clouds are unknown although spring water is plentiful—drying raisins is no problem. For centuries

the luscious white raisins have been carried by donkeys to Urumchi, the crossroads of caravans, and then distributed throughout Central Asia, and shipped to the West.

We came finally to the Flame Hills, the northern guardian of the oasis of Turfan. The hills were bare brown stone, scoured smooth by the blowing sands. During the cloudless days they absorb the sun's heat, and in the evening the warm air rises from the heated rock, shimmering, so that the rays of the sinking sun set the hills afire.

When the road topped the Flame Hills, an astonishing spectacle lay below. A few miles ahead our arid sea lapped at the shores of a verdant island, the oasis of Turfan. Soon we were driving through its famous vineyards.

Though fine for grapes, Turfan was bad for people. Because it lies in the bottom of an immense bowl unblessed by rain, the temperature rises to 130 degrees every day in summer. In these hottest months the populace, mostly Turki Moslems, live in caves underground, close to the cooling waters of the subterranean rivers. The streets are shaded by leafy arcades, but most business is conducted in the late evening. In winter the temperature drops to zero.

The truck stopped at a roadside inn, which in no way resembled Ye Olde Cozy Motel on Route 66, and we engaged a room in a mud compound for the night. This was the first in a long series of *lui-gwans*, the Chinese word for caravansary, which were to be our desert lodgings. Each tiny room has a raised *kang* of baked mud, for sleeping, and windows of oiled rice paper. A burning twist of lamb's wool, floating in a flat dish of oil, furnished the only light. All these comforts are available for a few cents a night.

We were awakened at four the next morning and ate jyawdz—a dumpling full of meat. They were steamed and about the size of my clenched fist. On this desert trip we often ate as many as eight apiece for breakfast. These, with tea, or a glass of hot potent grain distillate called baigar, if it was a very cold morning, lasted us through a long hard day.

When the truck left before dawn, we were not too surprised to

find that we had lost our seats in the cab to an affluent "yellow fish." The influence of the American consul, it seemed, had its boundaries. Sitting high on the back, I discovered, after many bumpy miles, that the best place to ride on a Gobi truck was atop the heap of freight and luggage, with your feet dangling over the side. It was too windy toward the front, too dusty over the back, and too rough over the wheels.

That evening we came to the town of Hami, which Marco Polo had found an oasis of strange customs, much discussed when the account of his travels first apprised Europe of the wonders of the East. In our *lui-gwan* that night, I read aloud to Franc from my trusty Everyman's Library edition of Polo's travels.

"The men [of Hami]," Marco Polo wrote, "are addicted to pleasure, and attend to little else than playing upon instruments, singing, dancing, and the pursuit, in short, of every kind of amusement. When strangers arrive and desire to have lodging and accommodation in their house, it affords them the highest gratification. They give positive orders to their wives, daughters, sisters, and other female relations to indulge their guests in every wish, while they themselves leave their homes . . . the women are in truth very handsome, very sensual, and fully disposed to conform in this respect to the injunction of their husbands."

I looked inquiringly at Franc. My husband is a man with normal impulses and excessive curiosity.

"Well?" I said.

"I believe I'll investigate." He didn't make a move. "I'll find the mayor, and tell him that according to Marco Polo I am entitled to the pick of the females in his household."

"Have you seen the females of Hami?"

"Yes," he sighed, "I have looked upon the females of Hami. Either the travelers of Marco Polo's day had very bad taste, or the standards of beauty have changed."

As we LEFT Hami three days later, a businessman climbed on top with a huge set of wapiti antlers still in the velvet. Franc

made a joking offer to buy them, and was quietly informed that the price was \$3,000! The businessman explained the Chinese regard for powdered wapiti horn as a powerful aphrodisiac, and that the antlers would fetch a good deal more than \$3,000 if he could get them safely to Shanghai. Franc muttered into the wind, "Why didn't I hunt elk, instead of ibex!"

That night, at the camel station of Lo To Chan, the bedbugs penetrated our Maginot Line of DDT and we picked up our sleeping bags and fled to the desert. Just after midnight the wind rose and began to howl, and black clouds blotted out the stars. Soon our bags were covered with six inches of sand and pebbles, and we staggered back into the inn where we slept on the mud floor under the kitchen table.

We made good time that day, crossing the barren pebble plains where even the sight of a clump of Asiatic sage would have been welcome. At nightfall we came to the Inn of the Seven-cornered Well, which could not have changed much since the area fell to Jagatai, third son of Genghis Khan. There were four small tables in the kitchen and overhead swung elongated lamps, with wicks of sheep wool and fuel of soybean oil. They reminded me of the fable of Aladdin; lamps have been shaped thus for three thousand years.

Winter moves swiftly in northwestern China, and we were shivering when we left the *lui-gwan* at the Inn of the Seven-cornered Well. Near our truck was a vender of hot baked potatoes. Franc and I bought one, split and ate it. Then, on inspiration, we bought four more, put them in our trench-coat pockets, and enjoyed them as excellent hand-warmers.

Eighteen hours later, after a freezing ride through a treeless wilderness of shale, sand, and eroded stone called Land of the Wind, we came to Ansi, tucked into the farthest corner of China proper, in northwest Kansu Province, where we bade good-by to Mr. Li and Mr. Kao. Here we were to swing south seventy miles, if we could find transportation, to the dying metropolis of Tunhwang, and the Caves of the Thousand Buddhas.

Centuries before the birth of Christ, traders discovered an oasis at Tunhwang. Sometimes it rained, and on occasion a river

flooded from its dry bed; always there was a spring, and greenery. A city rose nearby, and immensely thick walls were erected to protect it from the marauders of the north. In those days the Great Silk Road ran through Tunhwang, rather than Ansi, which was closer to the lands of the Mongol tribes, and weaker in its fortifications.

By the fourth century after Christ, Buddhism was the principal religion of the merchants whose hazardous routes ran all the way from the China Sea to the Mediterranean. Near the city of Tunhwang, in a great cave hollowed in the gorge of the River Shara, Buddhist monks established a temple. There the traders prayed for a safe journey on their way out and gave thanks upon their successful return. This temple rises ten stories high against the sheer cliff. Only one face can be seen from the outside. All the rest is contained within the cave. In the vaulting center chamber incense never ceases to smolder, and it resounds with the vibration of brass gongs beaten for prayer. Within the space of a mile, more than five hundred other caves and grottoes honeycomb the cliff. In these are found the Thousand Buddhas—and countless more.

As other avenues of travel opened China to the world, the Silk Road dwindled in importance during the seventeenth century, and the city of Tunhwang shriveled. Whole districts fell into decay, and the caves were looted and neglected. Foreign archeologists and explorers stripped the caves of manuscripts and objets d'art during those centuries. Chinese looted them of metal. White Russians, fleeing the Bolshevik revolution, somehow found their way to Tunhwang, and made their homes in the caves, blackening the walls with the smoke of their cooking fires. Still, the caves remain one of the largest repositories of Chinese religious art in the world today.

We hitchhiked a ride to Tunhwang the next day on an army truck carrying a load of felt yurts for the garrison there. Dwan Li-sen, an artist working on the restoration of some of the caves, escorted us through the Temple of the Great Buddha. We entered through an archway exquisitely carved, and painted with deep reds and golds, pigments that had withstood the pas-

sage of centuries. We passed down a hallway the walls of which were covered with Sung Dynasty murals of the temple guardians—monsters and dragons. As our eyes became accustomed to the gloom, an enormous figure loomed above us. It was the Great Buddha, which we estimated to be 180 feet high from his crossed feet to the top of his head. Scores of artists, working for many years, had carved this Buddha, comparable in size to the Sphinx of Egypt, from the virgin rock of the cliff itself.

For three days we climbed and walked, probed and photographed the sacred cliff, absorbing its lore and marveling at the exquisite artistry and colors. Many of the caves were linked by natural galleries, and corridors had been cut into secluded sections, making it possible to walk a mile or so on each level without seeing the sky. Nature, and the devotion of Buddhist traders, had created galleries larger than those in the Vatican.

We stayed in Tunhwang until we ran out of color film, partly on the hunch that this might be the last chance for a Westerner to see and photograph the caves. They are now in the hands of the Chinese Communists, who recently issued a stamp with a Tunhwang motif.

FROM ANSI to Wuwei to Lanchow we rode on postal trucks, slept with our boots on, and feasted on such exotic fare as dried sea slugs. At Yumen we passed through the famous Jade Gate, built to mark the farther border of ancient China, and from there on were flanked by the Great Wall. For miles and miles we could see it snaking over the hills, sometimes coiling to enclose an oasis town, sometimes sliding away and vanishing in the harsh wastelands. If you watched it long enough, it developed a hypnotic effect upon your senses, like watching the wake of a ship, or the rails slip away from the end of a train.

When we came at last to a smooth highway following the course of the rushing Yellow River, the Gobi was behind us. The countryside changed into an Oriental Netherlands, with water-wheels a hundred feet tall lifting water into irrigation ditches. Then ahead we saw the walls of Lanchow, and we passed

through its massive gates. We were in a city again, we had returned to civilization—back to electric lights and running water, beds with springs, knives and forks.

We planned to remain in Lanchow until we located, and visited, the grave of Genghis Khan. In the *China Year Book of 1947* I had read a cryptic, matter-of-fact item—"The remains of Genghis Khan, guarded by the Ikhchao League, were removed to Kansu Province in June, 1939." An American military attaché had told us, somewhat uncertainly, that he thought the grave was near Lanchow. None of our Chinese friends had ever seen the grave, or knew anyone who had seen it, yet the story, so far as we could ascertain, could be true.

For seven centuries the remains of Genghis Khan lay in a secret place after his death in 1227 at Liu Pan Shan, on the Suiyuan-Shensi border. Always this place was guarded by a Mongol band, the Alashan, now part of the Ikhchao League. They had been assigned this honor when the Khan of Khans died in his yurt at sixty-five, of a long-lasting disease perhaps occasioned by old wounds. In 1939, when the Japanese were sweeping province after province in China, the Ikhchao League, faithful to its trust, petitioned the Chinese government for permission to remove the casket to a safer place. This granted, the remains were brought to central Kansu, of which Lanchow was the capital, on the fringe of Genghis' native Gobi.

In the Gobi, and indeed in all Central Asia, there was a belief that whoever possessed the bones of Genghis Khan would one day rule the world. It was partly because of this tradition that Chiang Kai-shek made sure the casket would not fall into the hands of the Japanese.

From two unlikely sources we picked up valuable clues. From Bill Hassig, a jaunty pilot for the Chinese National Airline and a veteran of the Hump, and from Claude Appel of the Seventh Day Adventist Mission ("These Adventists know everything," explained Bill, "they've been here forever.") we learned that Genghis Khan's grave was somewhere near the village of Yu Chung, fifty miles southeast of Lanchow.

The isolated Adventist missionaries in Lanchow operated a

Marco Polo crossed this seemingly ageless and indestructible bridge, spanning the Yung Ting River, in 1275, and there first glimpsed the walls of Khanbalig, which he called Kanbalu.

As I leaned over the stone rail of the center span, I timidly broached a subject that had been in my mind for weeks. "Franc, do you realize that when he crossed this bridge, Marco Polo had reached the court of Kublai Khan and finished his journey?"

Franc eyed me suspiciously. "If Polo were alive today, I could use him as a correspondent in a divorce suit."

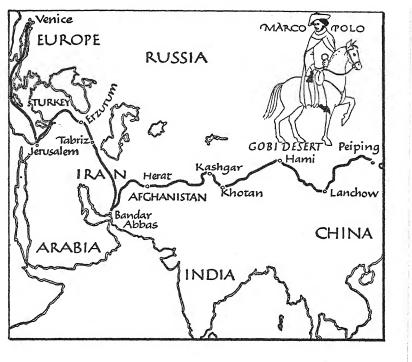
"Not only that," I rushed on, my pet cat almost out of the bag, "but do you realize that we've followed his trail all the way from Hami across the Gobi and central China? So why don't we do the rest of it? Why don't we retrace all Marco Polo's trip—from Venice east?"

Franc laughed and looked at me as if I were slightly mad. "I still ache from the Gobi. All I want to do is get back to our house in Shanghai, stretch out on my poor back, and have someone mix me a barrel of martinis."

I didn't press him, immediately. At least his answer was not a flat and candid no.

The next week we flew back home to an uneasy Shanghai. There was no denying the city's ominous atmosphere. Up in the north and west the fighting was going against the Nationalists, and each day the Communists moved closer. We had planned to make our home and headquarters in Shanghai for many years, but now we decided it was time to leave. Temporarily, we hoped. We rented our house, and found positions for our servants. What we could not easily ship home in foot lockers, we stored in the Broadway Mansions, headquarters of the American Military Mission, and in the Foreign Correspondents Club.

In our years in the Far East we had accumulated possessions that we prized highly, and hoped would be part of our home always, wherever it might be—the finest lacquer screens, antique Oriental furniture, Chi'en Lung vases, delicate porcelain and old silver, Han bronzes, hand-embroidered linens. We never saw any of it again.



## 3

#### THE TRAIL OF MARCO POLO

Even before we left Shanghai our future course was set. Franc, too, had begun talking about Marco Polo, tracing his route on old maps, muttering about Afghanistan and mountain ranges with queer names, reading up on the Shah of Persia. At last, and of a sudden, he had said it: "If you want to do this Marco Polo trip, then I suppose you must," as if the idea wasn't pulsing in his own head too. We would follow Polo's footsteps from Venice east to China. Franc had ten thousand dollars saved which we could devote to this whim of mine. He wrote it off under the heading: "Extended honeymoon, education, and peace in our house."

A quick flight across the Pacific from Shanghai dropped us into San Francisco, and the shock of returning to one's own land after years in the Orient was like immersion in clean, cold water. Of a sudden we were carrying our own bags, the officials were all efficient, "face" was of no importance, "squeeze" was unknown, and everybody spoke the same language, rapidly.

It is generally believed that your first act, when planning so ambitious a journey, is to lunch at the Explorer's Club, and then beat your way down Fifth Avenue, through dense crowds of overdressed natives, to Abercrombie & Fitch. There you are outfitted with butterfly nets, snake serum, elephant guns, pith helmets, and beads for the savages.

Actually the first thing to do is to get "shots," collect visas and maps, and inquire about the type of officialdom, customs, and currency regulations you are likely to encounter in the countries you intend to visit. After eight forms, six photographs, and seven days, the Iranian embassy gave us a visa to enter their country, but it was valid for only three months. We would have to hurry if it would still be in effect by the time we reached Persia.

The Afghan embassy could not help us. The embassy in Washington was not permitted, the first secretary explained, to issue visas except upon specific authorization from the foreign office in Kabul. He doubted that the foreign office would give such authorization.

We explained our desire to follow Marco Polo's trail across Asia. A friendly gleam lighted his eyes. "Wonderful idea! Impossible, but wonderful," he said. "I'll help you if I can."

We left identification photos, letters of recommendation, the many completed questionnaires and applications (you would have thought we were applying for a job, not a visa) and laid all our hopes in his hands as we said good-by that afternoon in early March. He would forward this mass of material to Kabul. If a visa was granted, he said, we could pick it up at the Afghan embassy at some capital along the route. Perhaps Paris or Ankara, perhaps farther east. If not—he was very sorry.

#### AFTER YOU, MARCO POLO

We understood what a gamble this was. We might travel across half the world, and then be turned back. But it was a gamble we had to take, if we were to beat the snows to the High Pamirs.

We remained in London only long enough to buy our maps and arrange for our photographic equipment to be transshipped to Venice.

Paris nearly wrecked our itinerary. We had planned to spend three days there, but it was April, the chestnut trees were in bloom, and the boulevards were glorious with color. A few months of marriage had taught me that Franc is something of a gourmet. In certain cities he has trouble with his waistline. Travel, I had discovered, gave him an excellent excuse to overindulge at the table.

"After we leave here," he said solemnly, "we won't get anything good to eat. We'll lose a lot of weight on that long hike over the Pamirs. We're liable to cross deserts where food is scarce. We may see famine areas. Better store up a little reserve."

Every day we "stored up a little reserve" in Laperouse and Maxim's and the Ritz and the Tour d'Argent. The three days became three weeks before Franc casually remarked one morning that the snows come early in the Pamirs. Wouldn't it be wise to postpone Marco Polo until next year?

That did it. My cherished project was being threatened by a cabal of chefs. I waited until a particularly fine lunch had put Franc in a mellow mood, and then I steered him into a travel agency, where we booked passage on the Orient Express, leaving for Venice the next night.

We had two goals in Venice. We had to visit the library and learn all we could of Marco Polo and his travels from the priceless original records housed there. And we wanted to see and photograph his home and place of burial.

The Venetian Library, called Marciana, was founded in 1305

by Petrarch, the great poet, scientist, and philosopher, and housed in a palace opposite that of the Doge. Piatro Zorzaenello, the director, escorted us to the room where the Polo mementoes were kept. These included fifty-seven versions of the *Travels*, the first date 1496, Marco Polo's will, and legal documents of the time concerning his property.

A young assistant tossed these historic documents on the table as casually as if they were yesterday's newspapers. We were flab-bergasted. In the United States such relics would be preserved in helium, under glass, and nobody would be allowed to touch them, much less play catch with them.

Marco Polo was born in Venice in 1254, of a noble family engaged in trade with Constantinople. His father, Niccolo, and uncle, Maffeo, traveled to the East before him, yet of this earlier journey little is known, for the elder Polos were merchants, not scribblers. Niccolo and Maffeo found the route to the court of Kublai Khan through an accident of war. They had set out on a trading expedition across the Black Sea from their base in Constantinople. When they reached the Crimea they found their return cut off by a Mongol war. There was nothing for them to do except travel eastward.

In Bokhara they found profitable business, and tarried there three years, meeting in the course of their trade the envoys of Kublai Khan. These emissaries persuaded the elder Polos to accompany them to Cathay. There they were hospitably received by the Great Khan, who was astonished at their tales of the Western world, and particularly impressed by their account of the philosophy of Christianity. Kublai Khan, a wise and farseeing ruler, decided that what Cathay needed was a spiritual renaissance. He dispatched the Polos back to Europe as his ambassadors to the Pope, with the request that the Church send two hundred missionaries to introduce Christianity to China. When the Polos reached Acre, in Palestine, they learned that the Pope was dead. They returned to Venice to await the election of a new pope. After two years the election still had not taken

place, but the Polos felt duty bound to return to Kublai and explain the delay. They took ship from Venice in 1271. This time Marco, then seventeen years old, accompanied them.

As they journeyed through the Levant they learned that the Legate of Syria finally had been elected Pope. They visited him in Jerusalem, but the Pope, like many others in succeeding centuries, discounted the Polos' stories. Instead of the requested two hundred missionaries he sent only two preaching friars. When the Polo party reached Armenia, the friars, alarmed at news of wars ahead, returned to Jerusalem.

In Shangtu, near Peiping, the Polos were welcomed back by Kublai Khan, who was particularly taken by Marco. This bright young man quickly learned the language and customs of Cathay, first as a protégé of the Khan and soon as a trusted adviser. On the Khan's business he traveled as a roving ambassador through isolated provinces and subject lands, even as far as India.

After seventeen years at the court of Cathay, Marco's father and uncle longed to return home. They were growing old and they wished to die in Venice. The Khan was reluctant to let them go. But at that moment a squadron was being prepared to escort a Mongol princess to Persia, where she was to marry the king. The Persian envoys insisted, perhaps at the secret urging of the Polos, that the three Venetians accompany the party, for they were expert navigators and had knowledge of the Western secret of sailing by the stars.

They sailed from China in 1292, and it took them more than two years to reach Persia. Six hundred men died aboard their ships, not unusual in an age when even the shortest journey was toothed with danger. While traveling overland across Persia they learned that the Great Khan had died. Saddened, they reached Venice in 1295.

A year after their return, Venice warred with Genoa, its sister city-state and rival for command of the seas. Marco commanded a galley which his family had equipped and sailed in the fleet of Andrea Dandolo. In the Venetian defeat, Marco was taken

prisoner and carried off to Genoa. During his three years' imprisonment he dictated his account of the *Travels* to a cell mate from Pisa.

Released and returned to Venice in 1299, he married, and built a minor Venetian palace. He acquired the nickname "Il Milione"—he of the million lies—because of his fabulous stories of China. Not during his lifetime was his story wholly believed, and the map of Asia was not redrawn until fifty years after his death. Some few had journeyed to the East before him, but it was Marco Polo who sang of its splendor, explained its customs and culture, and placed Asia, the largest continent, with some accuracy on the map of the world.

Now Franc and I sought out the home where he had lived, and the place of his burial. The original house, one of the oldest and most beautiful in Venice, was burned in 1597, and the Malabran Theater was erected on the site. Yet the area is still called Corte Milione, and we walked through the archway which once led to the house. We had no luck in locating the Polo grave, said to have been in the courtyard of the Church of San Lorenzo. What remains of the church is now a dismal municipal warehouse. The grave was moved in 1502 when the church was remodeled, the caretaker told us, but now no one is sure which weathered stone block stands over Marco's bones. But Marco Polo's memory is housed in something more substantial than granite. His was the genius of a teller of tales. The Travels is his monument. That one slender volume has captured, for kindred spirits through the ages, the lure of unknown lands. His was the grand tour of all times.

So we prepared to follow him. The first leg of our jorney, as with Polo, was to be by ship to Israel—Palestine in his time.



# 4

#### VENICE TO TABRIZ

THE ABAZZIA, on which we sailed to Tel Aviv, was a pleasant ship, and her passenger list was primarily composed of Jewish refugees en route to their new land.

We had been more than a week at sea when we docked at Tel Aviv. The Israeli consulate in New York had given us a letter to government officials, and we asked them for help in finding an interpreter. They loaned us Arnold Appelbaum, fair, slender, and handsome, and with Arnold came Sylvia. "I hope you don't mind if we both come," explained Arnold, "but I got out of the army only yesterday, and before I return to my law practice we had promised ourselves a belated honeymoon, starting today."

Arnold and Sylvia were Sabras, almost a people within a people. The original Sabra is a cactus plant, tough and dangerous and native to Israel. So are its namesakes. They were born in this land, and perhaps more than anyone else they are responsible for its survival. They formed the hard core of the Israeli Army, and they held the line against the Arabs while the Jews of the world gathered reinforcements. Present-day Israel owes a tremendous debt to them.

They took us to Acre, where Marco Polo had spent long months awaiting the election of a new pope, and we walked through the same iron-studded gates that had swung open to welcome the Polo party. We drove through the rocky hills to Jerusalem, and found a city battle-scarred and trigger-happy with tension, divided by the insecure peace between Jew and Arab.

At Jerusalem's once luxurious King David Hotel, now bombed and bullet-scarred, we met an old friend from Shanghai, Dr. Jerome Peterson, who had served with UNRRA in China and now worked with a UN emergency relief team among the Arab refugees in Gaza. He spoke glowingly of the Arab people. One anecdote in particular I won't soon forget.

"These Arabs," he said, "they've lost everything—homes, fields, and savings, and they live in squalor in the refugee camps. But they've kept their sense of humor.

"Last week I was watching them make application for special ration cards. Nursing mothers get an extra allotment of milk and fruit, and the tent was crowded with women, most of them carrying the yelling and kicking evidence of their motherhood. But one slender young woman came to the examiner's desk without her baby. The child was ill, she explained.

"In charge was a pompous British doctor. He told her he couldn't issue extra rations without evidence that she was a nursing mother. Didn't faze her a bit. She just unfastened her dress, lifted a plump breast, and squirted a stream of milk straight into the doctor's face. She got the card."

WE EMBARKED for Mersin, the port where Marco Polo first landed in Turkey, in the rusty little Turkish freighter Neçat. At Mersin, a harbor so shallow that it could not even accommodate a ship of the Neçat's modest draft, a launch came along-side, deep-laden with boxes, bales, baskets, potted plants, plows, kitchenware, picture frames, and sixty deck passengers ready to scramble on board. On the other side of the ship a lighter was unloading freight. Stevedores were streaming aboard to load bales of cotton and sacks of wheat from other lighters. Whistles were tooting and men were swearing in Turkish, and we were caught in this maelstrom of incredible confusion.

Franc resorted to the only infallible international means of communication. He took a stevedore by one arm and pointed to our luggage. In the fingers of the outstretched hand was a five-lira note, worth about two dollars. Almost immediately our luggage was placed in a rope sling, fragile flash bulbs on the bottom and heavy suitcases on top, and plummeted into a launch.

It is difficult for a waterfront town to be entirely unattractive, but Mersin managed it. It was not even picturesque, except to the nostrils. The streets were dirty and narrow, and the moment our luggage hit the dock a crowd of ragged porters swarmed over it, each determined to get one piece, preferably the lightest. The Mersin customs officials beat off the struggling porters, spread the contents of all eight bags on the dock and examined everything as carefully as if they expected to find diamonds. Satisfied at last, they accepted cigarettes, affixed a few tags and seals to the empty luggage, and left us to repack while the shouting porters were attempting to snatch the bags and suitcases from under our hands.

At dusk we got everything loaded into a donkey cart, ourselves wearily balanced atop the load. Fourteen porters held out eager hands, each insisting he had carried all eight bags. Franc handed a five-lira note to the largest and toughest-looking porter, made a sweeping motion to indicate it was for everyone,

and shouted to the driver to take off in a hurry. As we left, the porters were in a snarling heap. Underneath was the large man with the money.

The donkey cart stopped at the Taurus Hotel. The sign said "Oteli," but it was more like a barracks, with five iron beds to a room. We were too exhausted to look for something better, but before we could get settled three policemen appeared and politely indicated that we were to accompany them. In sign language, we asked where we were going. "Oteli," said the ranking policeman.

"But this is an oteli," I protested.

The officer clasped his nose between thumb and forefinger in a standard international gesture. We agreed, and followed to the Istanbul Palas, apparently the rendezvous of Turkish traveling salesmen and a considerable improvement over the Taurus. But more important, there we met our benefactor and guide, the omnipresent and inimitable Yanko Dabanovic.

Yanko was large, plump, and balding, with the pink face of a forty-five-year-old baby. He appeared at the hotel desk while we were signing the complicated registration forms, and introduced himself in excellent if somewhat stilted English. He was a Turk of Yugoslav ancestry, a businessman of Mersin, and he alone in town spoke English. He was, he said, at our service. It turned out that he meant just that.

He began by getting us the best room in the hotel. It was bare and drab and dimly lighted by one dangling, fly-specked bulb, but it had toilet facilities at a reasonable distance, down a flight of stairs and at the end of a long hall, and it had only three beds.

Yanko Dabanovic came to our door early the next morning. Breakfast, he said, was ready in his room. Would we please join him? We were reluctant, fearing to impose, but he insisted. A feast was laid out on a scrubbed wooden table in his bedroom, so different from our conventional bacon and eggs that I jotted down the menu in my diary: cucumbers, goat cheese, dried ripe olives, tomatoes, boiled eggs, yogurt, delicious flat bread, pre-

serves which Yanko proudly stated had been sent by his mother from Istanbul, and tea. While we ate, Yanko discreetly asked what we were doing in Mersin.

Our plan, we explained, was to follow Marco Polo's trail across eastern Turkey, through Erzinjan and Erzurum and past Mt. Ararat, and get into Persia before our visas expired.

Yanko pointed out that such a route was impossible without permission from Ankara, the capital. Ararat, one slope of which lies in Russia, was in a restricted military zone, and barred to foreigners. "To reach Ankara," he said, "you must first go by train from here to Adana. There you will catch the Baghdad-Istanbul Express. You can leave here tomorrow night. I'll attend to the reservations. Just leave everything to me."

We protested, but Yanko had adopted us. He assured us, beaming all the while, that his business—importing and exporting grain—wouldn't suffer if he took a day or two off. For the remainder of the day he insisted on acting as our guide, showing us through the bazaar, accompanying us to lunch and then on a carriage ride through the countryside in the afternoon, even playing host at dinner at his club that night.

The following evening, Yanko drove us to the station in a horse cart, and then insisted on accompanying us to Adana. "I've been worrying about you making your connection in Adana," he explained. "No one in the station there will speak English, and you might have trouble. I'll just ride with you to Adana and be sure you're safely off to Ankara."

During World War II Adana was a secret American air base, and its strategic importance has not dwindled. The air base at Adana now supports the port of Iskenderun, and the seaway to the British stronghold of Cyprus. If war came, Adana, known to but few Americans, would be of great use to the Western cause.

Yanko showed us a bridge of many arches, spanning the wide Yenice River. "It is believed," he said, "that after Marco Polo landed in Mersin he came this way and passed across this bridge. I believe this too, because Adana was the natural route to the East. If he came this way he must have crossed here."

I recalled Marco Polo's first impressions of the Turkomans. "A rude people," he wrote, "and dull of intellect." Poor Marco, he had no Yanko for a friend and guide.

In Ankara the government quickly granted our request to pass through the restricted zone near Mt. Ararat. Further, we received the help accorded all foreign correspondents in Turkey, including, for \$3.50 a month, a pass good on every railroad in Turkey and lowered rates for air travel.

From Ankara, we rode a train for three days on a winding route eastward. Our sleeping car was of 1900 vintage, but the car steward compensated by keeping a pot of tea on boil for us, and explaining in halting English the rugged land through which we chugged. Steadily the terrain rose, the mountains on either side grew taller and steeper, and the engine puffed and labored up the grades, slower and slower. The Turkish engines have a wonderful whistle that cries whoopee, whoopee, in sheer delight, and the engineers apparently enjoyed the sound too. They pulled the cord for every cow and curve.

We were headed for Erzurum, heart of the military zone where Turkey faces the Soviet Union across a border that is a no-man's land, brooding and dangerous. Erzurum was the end of the line. There the steel tie with European civilization ended. Indeed, when I think back on it, after we left Ankara, each thousand miles through Turkey, Iran and Afghanistan seemed to carry us backward in time a hundred years.

On the way to Erzurum, we made the mistake of stopping at Erzinjan, in Turkish Armenia. Marco Polo had written of this town: "It possesses the handsomest and most excellent baths of warm water, issuing from the earth, that are anywhere to be found." This sounded irresistible to such as we, grimy with cinders and smoke. Besides, if we didn't bathe in Marco Polo's warm springs, we might not have a chance again for hundreds of miles. But Erzinjan, we discovered, had changed.

No stranger enters a Turkish town without coming under surveillance. An officer in wrinkled uniform and a detective in a straw hat examined our passports, pretending to read them, and seemed impressed by our credentials from Ankara. We filled out the usual forms, and the detective, to whom we referred as Straw Hat Bey (Bey being the title for Mr. in Turkish), adhered himself to us and never let us out of his sight.

Our first encounters with the Secret Police were annoying to a couple of people brought up in a land where such things didn't occur, but eventually we learned to take advantage of their curiosity. We would leave the train or bus, pile our luggage in a neat mound in the center of the station platform, and stand beside it looking as if we didn't care if we ever left. Within a few minutes the intelligence agents would tire of waiting for us to make the first move, and take matters into their own hands. They would approach, examine our passports and permits, and load our luggage into a droshky. We had trouble getting hotel rooms, but they never did. Invariably they would escort us to the best hostelry in town, fill out the endless registration forms, wait to assure themselves that we stayed where we had been put, and arrange for us to be awakened in time to catch eastbound transportation. It was an arrangement which pleased everyone; they knew exactly where we were at all times, and we were always sure of a place to stay. It was like being met by a Thomas Cook man at every stop. All they lacked were caps lettered "Secret Police."

We asked Straw Hat Bey about Marco Polo's hot springs and he inquired of others, but nobody understood. I made motions like a spring gushing from the earth, and that worked. There was such a spring, but it was ten kilometers from town and no one bothered to go there any more.

We took Erzinjan's lone taxi over a frightful path, often blocked by herds of sheep, mules and cattle. Inside a dilapidated mud building was a twenty-by-twenty-foot pool filled with bubbling warm water. Dutifully and dubiously we dipped our

feet in the murky, sulfurous water. Either Marco Polo had very little bathing experience, or the years had dealt harshly with his "handsome baths."

At Erzurum a successor to Straw Hat Bey met us at the station, notified in advance of our coming. This Secret Police officer, whose headgear won him the title of Straw Hat Bey II, was wonderfully helpful, racing back and forth with the papers and credentials that would allow us to stay the night in his city, and booking our passage on the bus to the Iranian frontier.

Our bus was an old-fashioned, square-cut jalopy of uncertain make, and twenty-two of us were packed inside, including those who sat on stools in the aisles.

A Turkish major sitting nearby kept smiling at us, and at length he spoke, in perfectly accented English. "How do you do," he said. "You are welcome. Please sit down."

We were already sitting down, but I overlooked this. "It's wonderful to meet someone who speaks English," I said. "Do you know how long it takes to reach the border?"

"It is a very nice day," he replied. "I hope you are comfortable."

"Quite comfortable," I said. "But how long does it take to reach the border?"

"I hope you will stay for dinner," he replied brightly. "We are having roast beef and potatoes."

"We'd be delighted," I said, realizing that the conversation had somehow gotten out of hand. "I haven't had roast beef in a long time. But, by the way, when do we get to the border?"

There was a long, embarrasing silence. Then, in awkward, broken English the major said: "My English no more. I study on linguaphone. First lesson called Mr. Brown at home. Have used all first lesson words. Good-by, please."

As we had exhausted the communications facilities on that bus, we would have to depend on our eyes alone to absorb the land east of Erzurum. Spring was the perfect time to cross high Anatolia. Patches of snow still clung to the highest peaks and the rolling upland pastures were an almost electric green. The valleys were carpeted with flowers, and farmers were plowing with teams of twelve animals, usually ten cows and two buffaloes. Occasionally, we saw a horse and a scrawny camel hitched together in an unlikely team.

In small villages, we were served tasty hot meals in the local restaurants. Since we could never understand what the waiter said was on the plat du jour, he'd invariably lead me by the hand into the kitchen, lift the lids off the bubbling pots, and allow me to taste the dish, or sniff. Then I'd point out what appealed to me. Usually there were lamb stews, eggplant in oil, and yogurt topped almost every dish. Piles of fresh lettuce were served for dessert, and always there was coffee, thick as mud and heavily sweetened.

At Dogubayazit, where we lunched with the commandant of the last army garrison in Turkey, the bus had dropped everyone except an elderly Iranian, Franc, and me. At mid-afternoon we three came to the border post, a square compound with courtyard divided by a low concrete wall. The Turkish flag flew on our side, the Iranian on the other. The Turkish side was neat and orderly, the Iranian side was a deserted, windowless mass of rubble. We handed over our papers to the Turkish customs and immigration authorities, and while waiting were served chocolate and crème de menthe with great ceremony, the office windows framing the magnificence of Ararat, 16,945 feet high and wearing a glistening cape of snow. Instead of prowling around in our luggage, the Turkish customs officers allowed themselves to be photographed with the Polaroid camera. On parting they gravely shook our hands, speaking words which we couldn't translate, except as friendship from a stranger which surmounts the formidable barrier of language. Turkey had been kind to us; leaving was like abandoning a safe port for a strange sea.

We crossed the courtyard to the Iranian side, staggering under the weight of our baggage, but we couldn't find any Iranians. We had to find some official, and quickly. Our Iranian visas were due to expire the next day. Struck by the singular informality of it all, we walked back to the Turkish side, leaving

our luggage in Iran. The customs officials explained that the Persians sometimes didn't report at the border for work, but found it more convenient to perform their duties in the next village down the road, Maku, where diversions were to be found.

Maku was a dismal place where half the inhabitants lived in caves burrowed into the base of a towering sandstone cliff and the rest inhabited shacks and mud huts surrounded by a semicircular wall of boulders and hewn stones. There was no hotel in Maku, but we found shelter in the back room of a combination teashop and gambling house.

The armed local police greeted us next morning like long-sought bank robbers. Instead of taking us directly to the police station, they paraded us through the bazaar and then down the main street, showing off their catch. The ragged populace hardly seemed friendly, although I'm sure they didn't know whether we were Americans, British, or Russians, or whether we were held for smuggling, spying, or murder. We were ushered into the police station and ordered to sit on a bench. We sat there for an hour.

The governor arrived, wearing dirty striped pajamas that billowed around his middle and sagged in the rear. His unshaven, unwashed face oozed grease and looked as if it had just been raised from the soup. His lips were puffed and his mouth slack. When he sneered at us, which was often, you could see broken yellow teeth. We rose when His Excellency entered. He beckoned us into his office, and motioned us to another bench. Our passports fascinated him and he gazed at them frowning, his lips moving as if he were reading. But I noticed that he held one upside down. Then he tossed them into a basket on his desk.

The governor kept us on that backless bench for three hours before he condescended to send for an interpreter. He spoke sharply to the interpreter, in Persian.

"The governor wants to know why you are here, and where you are going?" the interpreter said.

"We are American journalists, following the route of Marco Polo from Venice to China," Franc replied quietly. "We are going next to Tehran."

"The governor does not recall any American named Marco Polo coming this way," said the interpreter, "nor does he see why you should be following him. In any event, to pass through Azerbaijan you must have a Red card. Where is it?"

"What's a Red card?" Franc asked.

"A special pass for travel in Azerbaijan."

"I didn't know we needed one," said Franc. "We have passports, and valid Iranian visas. Perhaps the governor will issue us a Red card."

"Impossible. They can only be issued in Tehran."

"Well, then we'll go to Tehran to get one."

"Oh, no. You cannot go to Tehran without a Red card."

Franc looked up at the picture of the Shah over the governor's desk. I could see the wheels turning behind the expressionless face. Franc is a poker player of no mean skill and he sensed the moment for a bluff.

"This is all most embarrassing," he said quietly, as if to himself. "We had planned to visit His Majesty in Tehran. In three days we have an appointment for an audience with the Shah. Now we will be late."

The governor looked startled, then contemplative. His eyes ran over our dusty, travel-worn clothes. The familiar sneer returned to his unpleasant features. He snapped at the interpreter.

"His Excellency says you do not appear to him to be the sort of people who would be granted audience with the Shah-in-Shah," said the translator, obviously embarrassed. "But since he does not want people of your type in Maku, he will let you proceed to Tehran."

The interpreter helped us buy bus tickets for the next town, Khoi. The small green bus was an antique crate, with dirty windows, mounted on a Chevrolet station-wagon chassis.

The road twisted under steep cliffs, offering glimpses of

Kurdish tribesmen, indistinguishable from those on the Turkish side of the frontier, camped beside the streams. Every five miles the bus was stopped by soldiers, for we were in a strategic area only a few miles from the Russian border. Over and over we explained about the Red card, and our lack thereof. Always we had to fill out forms before the bus could proceed. It was necessary to write our names, our birthdays, and the first names of our fathers. As we have the same birthday and our fathers have the same first name, the confusion was endless. Some of the soldiers thought we were acting smart, others thought we misunderstood, and a few believed we were twins. Our fathers' names, George Bowie and George Shor, and our birthday, March 24, can now be found on police blotters from one end of Azerbaijan to the other.

Had we known the fierce reputation of Khoi, we would not have been so relieved to leave Maku. For foreigners, Khoi is the most dangerous town in Azerbaijan. Religious fanaticism bubbles just beneath the surface and occasionally erupts in bloody display. A thousand Persian Christians were massacred in Khoi some years before our visit, and an American consular official was murdered there quite recently. The people of Khoi hate Christians and they hate foreigners. We qualified on both counts.

We jounced into the walled town just in time; the bus sighed and expired in front of the inn. In the late afternoon we strolled around Khoi, noticing that guards had been placed in front of the inn, but never guessing that they were there for our protection against possible mob violence. Nor did we know that we were followed by secret police, for the same reason. We were only aware that the people were not in the least friendly.

The bus was supposed to leave at seven the next morning. When our luggage was carried to the front door, we noticed dour-looking men gathering in groups outside the hotel. We sensed our danger. The gathering of a mob is not peculiar to the province of Azerbaijan, nor to Persia. Not until we were well out of Khoi did we feel safe.

ON OUR FOURTH DAY of travel from the Turkish border we suddenly left the eroded, dusty hills and entered a fertile plain. The cobbled road gave way to smooth city streets, and we were in Iran's second largest city, Tabriz, a city of more than 200,000, and the capital of Azerbaijan.

Marco Polo called Tabriz "a large and very noble city," and spoke of its commerce in silk and cloth-of-gold, and its "precious stones and pearls in abundance," which made me eager to see the bazaars. He also spoke of the "delightful gardens, producing the finest fruits," and indeed Tabriz seemed to have changed little, for each courtyard was a miniature oasis, and everywhere the city was fragrant with flower gardens and orchards. Baskets of rose petals were sold on the street corners. "The people of Tabriz like good odors," our driver explained. "They scatter petals around the rooms of their houses, and on elegant moonlight picnics, picnic guests are seated on piles of rose petals instead of cushions."

What I remember best about Tabriz was the caviar—wonderful Caspian caviar at two dollars a pound. We indulged at every meal, spreading it like peanut butter on slices of dark bread. It was especially good with light Persian vodka.

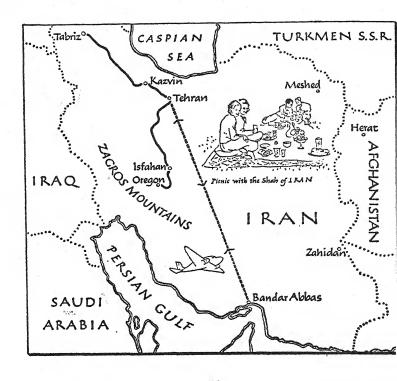
On our second day in Tabriz we had a brief and strange encounter with a man, dressed in a neat business suit, who stopped us in the street. "Americans?" he inquired.

<sup>&</sup>quot;Yes," we said.

<sup>&</sup>quot;We love you."

<sup>&</sup>quot;Why?" I asked.

<sup>&</sup>quot;I don't know," the man said. "We just do." And he walked away.



# PERSIA AND THE SHAH

IT WAS A HOT and dusty two-day trip from Tabriz to Tehran by bus. This particular vehicle was not only decorated with the expected religious charms and blue beads but with celluloid birds in cages and pictures of Hollywood starlets. These long-legged ladies in bathing suits and high heels indicated that we were approaching an oasis of modern civilization.

As we came close to Tehran, the road became smooth with macadam. We passed a modern airport with new concrete hangars, and then through shady streets flanked by canals, actually open water mains. We checked in at the Park Hotel, the best in the capital, and the largest establishment we had stayed in east of Ankara. There was an outdoor café set in the center of a gar-

den, and an orchestra whose favorite song was "Silent Night, Holy Night" played in rumba rhythm. Inside there was hot water and room service. These touches of luxury buoyed up our spirits to contend with the truly difficult problems that confronted us—the Afghan visas that weren't in our passports. The Afghan embassy in Washington had cabled their foreign office in Kabul asking that our visas be granted and that we be allowed to pick them up in Tehran. The world being the way it is, I had a hunch the visas would not be there and that our journey would come to an abrupt and ignominious end.

It was so hot in the mornings that we poured pitchers of water on the tile floor of our balcony to cool it while we ate breakfast. By 8:30 it was an effort to dress. Yet we walked in the sun, for it was on foot that we wanted to see the city. Along one street the merchants were opening their shops and "aging" Persian carpets. They dragged the new, brightly colored rugs, many of them magnificent in design and texture, into the busy street, and allowed all the traffic of the city to tramp or roll across them. Camels, donkeys, horse-drawn droshkies, decrepit taxis, and heavy army trucks all pounded the rugs. When traffic slowed, the shop owner ran into the street and quickly swept off the rug. In ten days a carpet's color could be so softened by the traffic and the fierce sun, and become so authentically worn, that an amateur collector or unsuspecting tourist might think it several hundred years old, undoubtedly the heirloom of a princely family.

A few days after our arrival, we visited the Afghan embassy. There our worst fears were realized. First the clerk, then the second secretary, and finally the first secretary assured us that no word had come from Kabul. We were thoroughly alarmed, and asked if we might have a word with the ambassador. We were not complete strangers to the ambassador as I had drawn him as a bridge partner a few nights before at the home of the American ambassador, John Wiley.

Franc's card went into the private office on a silver tray and in a moment we were drinking tea with His Excellency and ex-

plaining our problem. He personally searched the files. There was not so much as the mention of the name Shor in any correspondence from Kabul, and we were despondent. The ambassador smiled and said, with mysterious confidence, "Come back tomorrow at five for more tea. Perhaps something will turn up."

What could twenty-four hours produce in the way of a visa that all those weeks had not? The next day we were back at five, promptly and nervously, to drink more tea. After several cups the ambassador said finally, "I think there must be a little mistake about your names. I find in the files authorization to issue visas to two Americans. One is Mr. Wagner, a businessman, who has asked permission to fly his own plane to Kabul. I am instructed to give him a visa, but he must leave his aircraft behind." He looked at Franc intently. "Are you sure your name is not Wagner?"

"I am positive," Franc said.

The ambassador sighed and turned to me. "The other visa," he said, "is to be issued to a Miss Flagenheimer, a social science teacher from Des Moines, Iowa, who wishes to study family organization among the Pashto tribes. Your maiden name wasn't Flagenheimer, was it, Mrs. Shor?"

"No," I said. "Not Flagenheimer."

The ambassador sighed. "Well," he said, "to me it's a clear case of confusion in the cables. Obviously those authorizations were intended for you two. So if you will give me your passports I will have the secretary insert the visas. Now, how about some more tea?"

It dawned on us that the ambassador was a man of humor, determined to do us a great favor, in a somewhat Oriental manner. But for a moment, only a moment, I worried a little about Mr. Wagner and Miss Flagenheimer. "What will happen when they call for their visas?" I asked.

"Those authorizations have been in my file for months," said the ambassador. "Many people plan trips to Afghanistan and never complete them. Should these two come to Tehran I shall simply say, 'So sorry. Two Americans have been here already and we seem to have given them your visas by mistake.' Since all

Americans know that all foreigners are stupid, they will not be surprised. They can simply wait here for a month or so while I cable for new authorizations."

We walked back through the crowded streets in a pink haze. Our first big hurdle was behind us, and through sheerest luck. Already I was beginning to love the Afghans.

As Kabul had to be notified that we were en route, we could not leave for Afghanistan until the ambassador had cleared all lines with his capital, a matter of two weeks. But we did not fret, as Tehran had much to offer.

Most of all, we wanted to photograph and interview the Shah, who, revered by his subjects, perhaps holds more power than any hereditary ruler alive today.

At the American embassy, we presented our problems to Gerry Dooher, a sandy-haired Irishman who was special assistant to Ambassador Wiley. Photographing and interviewing the Shah would all be difficult, perhaps impossible, he told us. But he would do his best. The Shah had never been informally photographed, and an audience, rarely granted, seldom lasted more than fifteen minutes. The Shah-in-Shah was born in 1919, the oldest son of Reza Shah Pahlevi, a fierce soldier, who founded the present dynasty. The elder Pahlevi seized power in 1921 when the prestige of Persia was at its lowest ebb, and electrified the country by promising to throw off the dual yoke of Russia and England.

When the present Shah ascended the throne in 1941 (his pro-German father had been deposed) the Shah encouraged the Majlis, the national assembly, to take more seriously its constitutional duties. Every adult Iranian has the right to vote, but widespread illiteracy, lack of political consciousness, and difficulty of communications keeps millions from the polls. Political activity is largely confined to the cities, and vast outlying areas are still ruled by tribal chieftains.

Basically, the Shah had staked his personal and political fortunes on the same theory that inspired the Marshall plan: a

prosperous and contented people will not turn to violent revolution or heed the call of Communism. He sponsored a seven-year plan to increase agricultural production, modernize villages, and raise the standards of public health and education. He placed his younger brother, Harvard-educated Prince Abdor Reza, in charge. To spark the plan, he gave nearly all of his own large estates to needy peasants, hoping to set an example for other wealthy landlords.

This was the man we wanted to visit and photograph, not to talk politics, but to see how the King of Kings lived when not engaged in official duties. Gerry Dooher presented our application for an interview according to protocol through the foreign office, and for days we heard nothing.

Finally one evening a messenger intercepted us on our Tehran tour with a note from Gerry Dooher. The Shah would see us at ten o'clock the following morning, Gerry wrote. He didn't know whether photographs would be permitted, but advised us to take our cameras anyway. Our audience was scheduled for twenty minutes. The Shah would give us a clear indication when the interview was at an end, we needn't worry about overstaying our allotted time.

We were greeted on the steps of the white stucco palace, which was about the size of the White House, by M. H. Pirnia, a dapper little man educated in Italy, who was Iran's chief of protocol. Pirnia led us down a wide corridor, and an army officer opened the doors into the reception chambers. The Shah was waiting just inside.

He was a handsome, lithe and slender young man, much more attractive physically than I had imagined from his news photos. He was dressed in fawn-colored riding breeches and a tweed jacket. He shook our hands genially and seated us around a low table inlaid with pearl and ivory. Servants silently padded across magnificent carpets to serve tea. I was happily soaking up every detail.

The Shah, speaking English with a few French words dropped in for precise meaning, asked how we were enjoying his country.

We told him of our favorable impressions and that we had delayed our departure for Afghanistan to learn more of Persia.

This seemed to please him. "But I heard you had some sort of trouble in Azerbaijan," he said.

Really nothing, nothing at all, we lied. The principal thing was that we had reached Tehran, and we had our visas to continue our journey.

The Shah, too, was fascinated by the travels of Marco Polo, and began to question us about our trip—what we had seen so far, and what we expected to see. After a few minutes I began to wonder who was interviewing who. Then the Shah asked, "Precisely why do you want to interview me, and what sort of photographs do you want to take?" Obviously he was experienced in public relations.

Franc answered carefully, having prepared his "presentation" the night before, that America knew little of the Shah and his ambitions for his country. To Americans, the Shah was simply a Middle Eastern caliph. We wanted to show them how a Shah really lived, and to tell them of his plans for the future of Iran.

"That might be helpful," the Shah agreed. "How about starting with pictures in the garden? You've got color film, haven't you?"

We assured him that we had, and from there the Shah took over, suggesting that we go outside. I was greatly relieved; our audience was obviously going to be longer than the scheduled twenty minutes.

After a dozen informal photographs in the garden, he said casually, "I'm having a family luncheon today—a sort of picnic. Would you care to join us?"

Franc said we would be delighted.

It was the best and biggest lunch we'd eaten since we left Paris. It started with cream soup, then tender broiled chicken served with potatoes, green beans, fresh carrots, and a green salad. The Persian national dish, *cheloh-kebab* (rice with charcoal-broiled strips of lamb and chopped meat molded onto long skewers), came next, with a raw egg yolk. I wondered what to

do with the yolk until I saw the others mix it with the hot rice, a delicious dish that we ate many times thereafter in Iran. Then came coffee ice cream, huge platters laden with juicy melons, Turkish coffee and, oddly enough, tea.

At five o'clock we left, after seven hours at the palace, with an invitation to return the next day. As far as Tehran was concerned, we had "arrived." Back at the palace the following afternoon, there was more political talk and later we watched the Shah play tennis against a professional, and beat him. The referee was completely impartial, but I'd hate to have to call "out" or "foot fault" against the Shah. Not in Persia, anyway.

As we were preparing to leave, we told the Shah about the next leg of our journey. In order to follow Marco Polo's footsteps exactly, it was necessary to journey south to Bandar Abbas, which would be as useless a junket for us as it had been for Polo. Polo had gone south in the mistaken hope that he could find a boat to take him to China. He had been told that seaworthy boats were available on the Persian Gulf. Like so much information given freely in the Middle East—then and now—it was wrong. He had to return to northern Iran and enter Afghanistan through Meshed, as we planned to do.

The Shah thought the whole thing foolish. He counted up the number of days we would lose, and predicted, gallantly, that I wouldn't be able to stand the heat. Franc said he had less doubts about my surviving the heat than about his own chances. Still we didn't want to renege on our map of Polo's wanderings and clung to our original plan.

"Why don't you fly south?" the Shah suggested.

We had already tried the commercial lines, and all flights had been canceled until autumn. Passengers would bake in a metal plane standing on the desert airstrips in July and August.

"Would a private plane do?" the Shah asked. "If you can go on short notice, I'll fly you south over the Polo route, and back again."

I was too stunned by the generosity of his offer, put so casually, to express my thanks. Franc found his tongue, however, and I am sure our pleasure was evident in our ready acceptance.

A few days later with the Shah in the pilot's seat of his B-17 we flew south over the badlands and desert, passing over Isfahan, Shiraz, and then Bandar Abbas. We turned at the sea's edge, and returned over the lifeless desert.

Back on the ground, we remembered to tell the Shah how a predecessor of his had furnished an escort of 170 horsemen for Marco Polo on his return through Persia, when the Polos were bringing one of Kublai Khan's daughters to wed the king.

The Shah looked amused. "You say the king gave Polo an escort of a hundred and seventy horsemen? I believe I've done a bit better by you two." He looked up with pride at the B-17. "I've given you an escort of forty-eight hundred horsepower."

Thus did the Shah of Iran help us keep faith with Marco Polo, whose footsteps we followed even where they erred. And yet I couldn't still a twinge of conscience that told me we were cheating ourselves of knowledge. For a view from the air is not like travel on a four-legged beast.

Before leaving Tehran, we had a last visit with the Shah. While leafing through our photographs, all of which he approved for publication, the Shah said, "Remember your friend in Maku?"

We certainly did. We had entertained the Shah and his family, at the picnic, with an account of our adventures in Azerbaijan, and the pajama-clad governor of Maku had been the villain of the story. Still, I was surprised that the Shah should think of it.

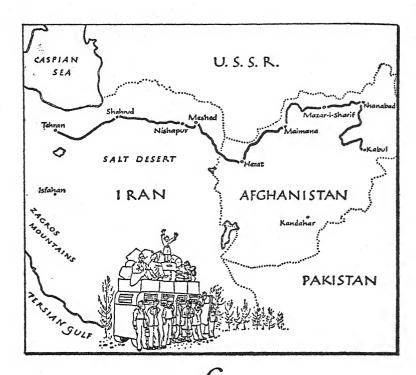
"I feel he needs a lesson in manners," said the Shah, selecting from the pile of photographs, one showing himself and Franc standing side by side on the palace terrace, inspecting a book, and looking for all the world like old school chums.

The Shah rang for a secretary, had an envelope bearing the royal crest addressed to the governor of Maku, and dropped the picture into it. No message, just the picture.

"Send this immediately," said the Shah.

Ocassionally we think of that poor man of Maku just sitting in his filthy office, waiting for the ax to fall.

I wish I could bring myself to feel sorry for him.



### 6

#### TEHRAN TO KABUL

THERE ARE ALL SORTS of conveyances that can transport you around this world, and I have traveled in everything from Bengali jungle dugouts to a Mediterranean yacht and to trans-Pacific airliners, but the bus that carried us east from Tehran was in a class by itself. It seemed designed for torture rather than travel. The springs were lifeless, and the narrow, upright seats were splintered. An Indian fakir would have adored them. Furthermore, the seats were not designed for longish Americans. The tops caught us just below the shoulder blades, the sharp edges cutting into our spines with every jounce, while our knees banged against the seats in front of us. We decided that Marco

Polo, on horseback, was a lucky gent to have predated the "conveniences" of modern transportation.

We reached Meshed, the holiest city in Iran and third holiest in the Moslem world during Ramadan, the Moslem period of fasting, when the faithful are forbidden to eat or drink between sunup and sundown. Thus all who can, stay indoors during the day. We were anxious to get off the streets, for the city has a reputation for anti-Christian feeling.

We took a droshky, adopting as a guide a small boy who claimed he knew the whereabouts of the American missionary hospital where we hoped to sleep. As soon as we rounded the corner he leaped off and asked directions of a passer-by who obviously had never heard of the mission. This was repeated several times, until finally an English-speaking Armenian directed the driver. We immediately fired our guide.

Our droshky rattled through twisting alleys and stopped at a barred doorway. Franc knocked, a servant appeared, and led us through a labyrinth of halls and arches, and into a large living room where two couples sat chatting. Nicely furnished mission, I thought. We introduced ourselves, and one of the men arose and said, "I'm John Waller. You're just in time for a drink."

Very strange missionaries, I told myself. Franc asked, "Is this the American mission?"

"No," said Waller, laughing. "This is the American Consulate."

We were caked with the dust and sweat of miles, and, as we learned later, could not have arrived at a more inopportune moment. The Wallers had just opened the consulate, Mrs. Waller was about to have a baby, most of their furniture was still unpacked, and the British consul and wife had come to dinner that night for the first time, so the Wallers were anxious to make a good impression. Nevertheless they invited us to join them at dinner and offered us a comfortable bedroom. Not until the next morning did we learn that the Wallers had slept on cots on the terrace. Ours was the only bedroom in the house.

After dinner we discussed transport to the Afghan border. John said that an Anglo-Iranian oil truck made occasional trips, and one was scheduled to leave in about three days. Then he laughed. "Once in a while," he said, "they lay on an extra truck—make a special trip—when I want to get rid of someone."

It was just a passing remark without significance until the next morning when, to our surprise, John awakened us at six. Anglo-Iranian, he explained, had found it necessary to run a special truck to the border.

"When does it leave?" Franc asked sleepily.

"In thirty minutes. You can just make it. Breakfast is ready downstairs."

We made it. As we jounced out of the outskirts of Meshed I asked the driver why the special trip. "I'm not sure," he answered, "except it was an emergency. They called me after midnight and told me to be ready to go out. The manager said something about doing a favor for an American friend of his. That's you, I suppose?"

Eighty miles east, in the village of Turbat-i-Jam, for the first time we found ourselves out of communication, written or oral, with the world. There the truck driver delivered us to the home of another Anglo-Iranian employee, and left. By and by, he predicted, a postal bus would come this way, and undoubtedly would take us farther toward the Afghan border.

To our great relief, the very next day a postal bus rumbled into Turbat-i-Jam and the turbaned driver welcomed us aboard as formally as if he captained a ship. This Persian postal bus not only carried mail and people but baskets of melons, cans of goat's milk, boxes and parcels of all varieties. Once it stopped to give a lift to a tribesman leading a sheep. The tribesman swore he had no money to pay the fare. Our driver searched him, found no money, and let him ride free. The sheep was lifted into the bus and stood quietly in the aisle.

As we entered Youssefabad, the last town before the border, we could see dust rising from a bus, just leaving and headed east.

We had missed a vital connection by a matter of minutes. As the next bus for Afghanistan would not leave for four days, the situation was at once exasperating and ridiculous. Every day was precious to us, if we were to reach the Wakhan before the snows. The Afghan frontier was only two hours' drive away, and yet without transport it was as inaccessible as the moon. We wandered through every street in town trying to hire a means of conveyance, any means. Two camels would have been fine. We had no success.

On the third day of fretting in Youssefabad, our luck changed. A Persian diplomat traveling to Herat, the first large Afghan city on the other side of the border, was driven up to the customs post in a feeble British Ford fitted with a luggage rack on top. He generously offered to give us a lift to Herat.

In an hour and a half we were at Islam Qala, the border, and since we were traveling with an official, formalities were kept at a minimum. The guard officer asked for our passports and Franc accompanied him into the bleak shack while the visas were checked. The rest of us baked silently in the tiny car.

Inside the shack, while Franc watched, the guard carefully read our passports, page by page, upside down. Then he nodded wisely, reached for his rubber stamp. We were safely in Afghanistan.

The Persian diplomat dropped us at the largest inn of Herat, one of a chain of guest hostels built about 1930 by the assassinated king, Mohammed Nadir Shah, the first of Afghanistan's modern rulers. It had fallen into disrepair, since so few travelers have been admitted in recent years; yet, wonder of wonders, we were given a room with bath. Quite a unique bath, as it turned out. When you pulled the stopper in the tub, the water drained out on the floor. The American toilet was appropriately named "The Real Niagara." When you pulled the flush chain a cascade of water descended on your head.

Soon after our arrival, the Afghan manager came to our room and spoke the magic word "Police!" The word must be the same

in every language. How typical, I thought. Here we were, dirty, tired and hungry, and before we could even wash our hands we would have to contend with the police.

Not so. The "police" was on the office telephone. When Franc answered, a pleasant voice said in English, "This is Rafik, chief of police. I know you must be tired from your trip. What time would it be convenient for me to call in the morning to check your passports?"

Franc could not keep the surprise out of his voice. "Make it ten o'clock and thanks for the consideration." This gentleman seemed so out of character for the Middle East.

Promptly at ten Rafik arrived, a rotund, forceful-looking man dressed in a Western suit but wearing a karakul hat. He welcomed us to Herat, rapidly and efficiently checked our papers, and then asked what he could do to help us.

"The first thing you can do," Franc said, "is tell us where you learned English."

"Sure," he smiled. "For two years I served with the Royal Canadian Mounted Police in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan."

We told Rafik about our Marco Polo trip and our desire to follow the northern route, as Polo had, to Kabul. Rafik looked worried. All modern travelers to Kabul used the southern route through Kandahar, he answered, which took only two days, or the central road, which took four. There was, he warned us, no real transportation service whatsoever on the Polo route, there were few inns, the mountains were high, it was on the Russian border, and we would find no one who spoke English. We refused to be discouraged and Rafik finally gave up. "I'll do what I can for you. I'll get you seats on the next bus headed northeast and have it call at your hotel."

Herat, a city of 85,000, was once twenty times as large, a great commercial and communications center for all of Asia. It was also known as the artistic capital of the Middle East, the home of the finest miniature painters. Its origin is lost in antiquity, but some believe it as old an inhabited place as there is on earth. Around the present city are many square miles of rubble

and ruined walls, the debris of forgotten civilizations. Because of its strategic position at a crossroads between Russia, India, and Persia, Herat was overrun by conquering armies time and time again, pillaged, looted, burned, but always rebuilt. In 1232 Genghis Khan stormed its enormous earthen walls—250 feet wide at the base—and in the resulting massacre only forty inhabitants of a population of more than a million survived. Tamerlane overwhelmed Herat again in 1383 and slaughtered nearly all its inhabitants. Yet it was his descendants who decreed Herat should be their capital, and who inspired its age of splendor.

One afternoon while we were drinking tea at a side-street café, a crowd began to gather, muttering and gesturing. The omnipresent police drifted our way and one, who spoke a little English, said, "I think madam move now."

"But why?" I demanded. "Why?"

"Madam's face is showing," said the policeman.

Thank goodness Franc didn't think it that bad. Feeling absolutely naked, I left.

One night late in July a bus decided to travel northeast. Rafik shook our hands, wished us luck, and, obviously somewhat relieved, put us aboard. For most of the next eleven days and nights we traveled on the world's most haphazard transportation system, a succession of Afghan buses. Afghanistan is one of the few large countries in the world in which there are no railroads. At the end of the first eight days we had traveled only 510 miles from Herat to Mazar-i-Sharif, the holy city of Afghanistan.

An Afghan bus runs by no schedule, nor is there such a thing as "making a connection." Each time a bus reached the end of its particular line and turned back west again, we were left stranded in some public square.

We stopped in towns with names like Qaisar, Andkhui and Agchah where no one spoke English, French, Turkish, or any other language that we knew. At first we didn't speak a single word of Pashto, and were walled in by our linguistic shortcomings. In Afghanistan, even the sign language was different.

Early in our travels, Franc had compiled a list of one hundred words and phrases necessary no matter what the country or language. As soon as he could, after entering a country, he would learn the local equivalents. First, how to count from one to ten. Then, "Where is the—" and a list of nouns such as hotel, food, bus, water. Next came "How much?" Then, "Too much!" We put his system to good use crossing the wild sections of Afghanistan.

Our buses stopped for everything. They stopped for tea six times a day, and also at odd hours throughout the night. They stopped for Moslem prayers even more often. Moslems regularly pray five times a day, but as our passengers belonged to two different sects, Sunnites and Shiites, who didn't agree on prayer hours, there were ten stops daily for foot washing, then prayers. We also stopped for hitchhiking shepherds, burned-out headlights, flat tires, clogged gas lines, no oil, or simply because the engine wouldn't run.

Mazar-i-Sharif, the Holy City, where the fourth caliph, Hazrat Ali, is buried, was a sizable oasis with 30,000 inhabitants. We had been warned that the population disliked Christian infidels, and not to go near the mosque. The local inn seemed hospitable enough, and the proprietor, who was porter, waiter, room clerk and laundryman as well, showed us to a room with two bed frames and a table. Real luxury. Across the hall was a bathroom, of which he was inordinately proud. All it lacked was water pipes; there were none anywhere. We admired the porcelain fixtures, however, so as not to hurt the manager's feelings and suppressed our smiles when we saw the toilet. The seat had been put on upside down.

Wherever we stopped to make photographs we attracted crowds, and thought it best to move on. Near the mosque, a group of ugly-looking boys began to follow us. The crowd grew, and the boys hooted, yelled, and finally threw a few rocks. The oldest made rude signs and gestures of throat-slitting. We hurried back to the hotel, where the manager explained that since

I was the first American woman to visit Mazar-i-Sharif, their "curiosity" was understandable.

He comforted us with a bowl of peaches, for which the area is world-famous. They were bigger than a teacup, flushed pink in color, and so juicy that it was best to eat them while leaning over the balcony rail.

IN CONTRAST to the boys who had stoned us in Mazar-i-Sharif, our fellow passengers on the bus to Kabul were helpful and pleasant, although few of them had ever seen any Americans. Whenever one of them split a melon, we were handed a slice. Grapes and apples, sometimes dried fruits and raisins, were also pressed upon us.

Everywhere along the route, history was mute before us, frozen in stone. Ruined castles perched in impossible places. These, the Afghans said, were "Kaffir-ha," meaning pre-Moslem, and we would speculate how the tides of successive invasions must have swept around them, and of the long-forgotten battles that destroyed them. We passed mounds of adobe that marked the sites of caravansaries. Occasionally we overtook long camel caravans winding through the dunes to the sonorous accompaniment of their bells. Our bus crept at a steady twenty-mile-anhour pace across deserts, around hairpin turns ascending high mountains, and along the ditches of irrigated valleys. Marco Polo's descriptions still fitted the route perfectly, and his book read like a recent dispatch, accurate even in detail, for this land had changed little in seven hundred years.

The gateway to Kabul is the awsome gorge of the Shibar River. The cliffs rise three thousand feet straight up from the edge of the roaring river, and the road, a masterpiece of engineering, is carved from the living rock. It is the most spectacular scenery in all Afghanistan. We came the length of it on a bright, clear night with a full moon.

The gorge narrowed, the stream grew thinner, and we climbed

steadily until we stopped for a moment atop the spectacular Shibar Pass, 8,379 feet high. We had crossed the Hindu Kush divide. The terrain dropped swiftly thereafter, and we picked up a new stream running in the opposite direction. Soon we entered a land of fruit trees and fertile fields and irrigation ditches. The character of the people changed as well. The country Afghan wears baggy trousers, shoes with turned-up toes, long-tailed shirts, black waistcoats and turbans. Now the men we passed, although similarly clad, seemed better dressed, taller, stronger.

Afghanistan's capital is a city of 120,000, but there was only one hotel that catered to foreigners, the Kabul Hotel. We stuffed the potbellied stove in our bathroom with wood and waited for the luxury of hot water, reveling in our brief respite from travel.

Our big task, perhaps the most difficult of all, confronted us now. We must somehow persuade Afghan officialdom to let us travel through the Wakhan. As a preliminary step, Franc asked to meet the American ambassador, only to be told that the ambassador was very new and very busy, and could not see us. However, we could call on a vice-consul in the afternoon.

The vice-consul was not new in Kabul, nor busy, but he was very young, rather bored, and quite supercilious. He asked what had brought us to Kabul, and Franc casually laid it on the line for him. "Only two things," Franc said. "We want permission to cross the Wakhan, and we want to photograph and interview the King."

The young man was horrified. From his expression you might have thought that we had asked permission to assassinate the King, not just to photograph him. As for the Wakhan . . . "It is absolutely impossible to get permission to enter the Wakhan," he said. "Sensitive military zone, you know. Many people have made the same request. Have, for years. Not one has been granted.

"As for seeing the King, why that's absurd! He never, never gives interviews. Even our ambassador only sees him when he presents his credentials. Photographs, of course, are absolutely out of the question."

The one favor the uncooperative vice-consul did us was to refer us to Syed Kasim Khan Rishtya, the chief of the Afghan Department of Press. Mr. Rishtya was a pleasant surprise. He spoke excellent English, was cordial and well-informed, and he not only had time for us, but seemed genuinely sympathetic and interested. It did not seem so strange to him that we should want to follow the trail of Marco Polo through Afghanistan and beyond. Rather it seemed a fine adventure.

He asked what magazines we wrote for, and when Franc mentioned *The National Geographic* Rishtya seemed extraordinarily pleased. "His Majesty," he said, "is a member of the National Geographic Society. It is just possible—"

I took a deep breath, held it, and waited. "It is just possible," he continued, "that His Majesty will receive you. He likes *The Geographic* very much."

"And the Wakhan?" I ventured.

Rishtya smiled speculatively. "I don't know. But I'll do my best . . ."

Hope springs eternal. We floated out of Rishtya's office on the wings of optimism.

We assured each other that everything was going to be all right, and readied ourselves for departure. It was mid-August, and the days were growing perceptibly shorter. As an ominous sign we had our first cloudy day since leaving England.

There was no civilian telephone service in Kabul. Messages were carried by "bearers" who trotted around the city. Finally, such a uniformed government bearer brought a note to the hotel. Rishtya wished to see us immediately.

As soon as we walked into his office we could tell that the news was good. Rishtya's eyes twinkled behind his horn-rimmed spectacles, and he was smiling. "I think," he announced, "that you are on your way!"

"Through the Wakhan?" Franc said.

"You have a chance. I have talked with the minister of war, the minister of the interior, and the prime minister. They raised the usual objections. But I pointed out that you had been allowed to pass through military zones in Turkey and Azerbaijan,

and indeed had passed along our own frontier with Russia on your way here. So they are agreeable—at least with the consent of the King."

"The King has assented, then?" Franc asked.

"The King will give you an audience. He will permit photographs. He wants to talk to you, and you can present your case directly to him. After that, we shall see."

The very next morning, Rishtya drove us to the palace, a great, gray stone pile on the outskirts of the city. We waited a few minutes in the vast, two-story reception hall then were escorted into the office of His Majesty, Mohammed Zahir Shah. The room was frighteningly large, larger even than Mussolini's office in the Palazzo Venezia in Rome. It seemed as if we walked a mile across the regal red and gold carpeting before we reached the King's desk.

His Majesty was as gracious as the room was forbidding. He stepped from behind his desk, shook hands with us, and introduced his uncle, General Mohammed Omar Khan, the minister of war.

We photographed the King at his desk, and when Franc explained that informal pictures were preferred by United States publications, the King invited us to his summer palace at Paghman that afternoon to take photographs, in the gardens, of him and his young son, Prince Mohammed Nadir Khan.

We returned to the hotel for lunch, by which time Franc had a violent and alarming chill, which took the edge off our elation. We sent for Dr. Mohammed Yusuf who, we learned, had studied in the United States at the Long Island College of Medicine. He examined Franc and quickly diagnosed malaria. "In Afghanistan," the doctor added casually, "everyone has malaria."

I explained that we had to be at the Paghman Palace that afternoon for as important an appointment as we had ever had, and that Franc simply had to keep it. Dr. Yusuf injected a potent anti-malaria serum into Franc's arm. "You'll make it," he predicted confidently. Though Franc was groggy, and had a high fever, we managed to arrive on time to photograph the King and prince in the vast formal garden of the summer palace.

As we left the palace, I acted on a sudden impulse. I liked the King. He was receptive, intelligent, and friendly, and he had conferred an enormous favor upon us. He alone was giving us the chance to continue our journey. I wanted to give him something in return, so I handed him our Polaroid camera. It was certainly the first one to reach Afghanistan.

He seemed a little startled at the gift, but he took it graciously enough. How was I to know that kings customarily accept presents only from other kings?

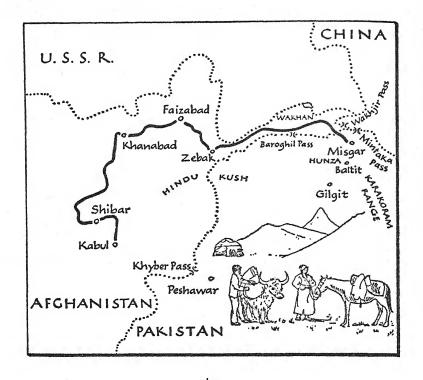
Mr. Rishtya called at our hotel the next morning. He spoke like a drama critic, rendering verdict on our performance. "The King," he said with great enthusiasm, "was much impressed with your manner and bearing. His Majesty has given orders that everything be done to facilitate your journey."

We were a "smash hit."

Rishtya would assign a young journalist to accompany us as our interpreter. The prime minister had issued an order to all government officials to help us. This was equivalent to an act of parliament. The minister of war would provide a military escort for the most dangerous part of the route, when motor roads came to an end and we would travel by horse and yak. The minister of aviation had ordered an altimeter removed from one of his antique biplanes so that we could check the altitude as we progressed through the land of unconquered mountains. A station wagon had been secured for the trip to Faizabad.

That night chills and fever returned to Franc, and he became extremely ill. Dr. Yusuf rushed to the rescue with more shots, and predicted that the attacks would end in forty-eight hours. But Franc was on his feet next day, Tuesday. There was much still to do, for we had decided to leave on Friday.

The Roof of the World—the High Pamirs—awaited. All the petty man-made obstacles lay behind us. Only the mountains themselves, the snowy passes, the wilderness, could stop us now from following the footsteps of Marco Polo to China. This was the challenge we had come halfway around the world to meet.



## THROUGH THE WAKHAN

THE WAKHAN corridor is a long, gnarled finger of Afghanistan held in a vise between Pakistan, on the south, and Soviet Russia, to the north. Its eastern tip digs into Chinese Turkestan, of which Urumchi, where I first thought of following the trail of Marco Polo, is the capital. To reach the Wakhan from Kabul we would be aided by gasoline for the first five hundred miles, retracing our path north across the Shibar Pass, then swinging east to Faizabad. A road was under construction for forty-five miles beyond Faizabad. From there on it was "Indian country." We would travel by horse and yak, or on foot.

Some seventy miles of our route, once we entered the corridor, would run along the south bank of the River Oxus, now

called the Amu Darya. The north bank was Russia. Our ascent toward the headwaters of the Oxus, and the divide beyond, would take us into a land of unnamed peaks and untamed peoples, and beyond the protection of any sovereign or law. Our only exits, unless we were forced to turn back, would be the 16,000-foot Wakhjir Pass into Chinese Turkestan, or the even higher passes that dropped from the southern tip of the finger into Pakistan. Marco Polo had done it, but I would be the first woman to traverse it.

We were too elated over having surmounted the political difficulties, and too busy with last minute preparations, to worry over the formidable physical obstacles that lay ahead. In the bazaars we shopped hurriedly for supplies. In addition to cheese and chocolate—food that would give us maximum energy with minimum bulk—we found tinned meats, Bovril, and candles. We put together a small medicine kit; a friend from the embassy presented us with a bottle of bourbon, scarce and valuable as liquid gold.

We took along real gold too. We had been told that paper afghanis would be acceptable until we reached the Wakhan, and that we could buy Chinese silver taels in Faizabad. But for an emergency, we decided to obtain gold pieces. No man yet has ever refused one.

Press Director Rishtya provided an interpreter, Ghulam Hazrat Koshan, a young journalist who turned up at our hotel protesting that he would much rather stay at home. Koshan was nicely dressed, well-educated, and spoke excellent English. His face was pink and round, and his hands soft. For an hour he sat and told us the reasons why only the King's order (which could not be disobeyed) compelled him to accompany us. We had misgivings from the first about Koshan. "He's a city boy," Franc said, "and I'm not sure this trip is the place to re-educate him."

But we were assured that he was the best interpreter in Afghanistan.

For the trip to Faizabad we hired a station wagon and driver. Rishtya told us that the government would provide yaks and

horses, along with an armed military escort, from Faizabad to the Chinese border. Everything seemed set. We wrote letters to our families telling them to expect to hear from us in Peiping in four or five months. We were that optimistic.

We left Kabul on August 19 determined to make the five hundred miles to Faizabad in three days, a tremendous feat over Afghan roads. Outside Kabul the road twisted upward, and it began to rain, cooling us off for the first time in weeks. We crossed the Shibar Pass for the second time shortly after noon, and stopped for lunch at a delightful seven-thousand-foot altitude.

During the afternoon, the rain grew to the proportions of a cloudburst, and our progress slowed. When night came we were nowhere. At eleven o'clock Mohammed, the driver, slammed on the brakes and began to swear. Peering through the rain-blurred windshield, we could see that a dozen yards ahead the road disappeared in a muddy torrent. A flash flood had swept down the gullies, and this little stream was on a rampage. We would have to wait for it to subside.

Before dawn the flood had run off and we were able to start again. Koshan complained of a stiff neck, the first in a long line of laments that was to last until we parted.

As we neared Faizabad the road snaked upward along the side of a crumbling cliff, our wheels running beside a sheer drop of a thousand feet. Koshan took one look, wrapped a sweater around his head, put his head on his knees, and began to shake and moan. Mohammed called repeatedly upon Allah. On hairpin curves he stopped the station wagon and walked around the corners to be sure there was still a road ahead. He would return shaking his head ominously, his teeth actually chattering. I am sure he would have insisted on turning back, had there been any place to turn around.

Just at sunset we rounded the shoulder of the mountain, and beneath us lay the neat little town of Faizabad, its white clay houses gleaming in green fields. We had been told in Kabul that Faizabad was the last outpost of civilization, but it seemed more like a mountain resort, remote but pleasant. We were billeted in the government's comfortable guest house, on beds which had wire springs but no mattresses. We were greeted by Mohammed Wajid, editor of the provincial weekly and a friend of Rishtya, who told us, in excellent English, that the governor, Sawar Khan, was waiting to receive us.

Sawar Khan was a gray-haired man of considerable distinction. He wore a blue business suit, but he carried himself like a soldier. By the telegraph line that ran from Kabul to Faizabad, he had been informed of our coming. Franc formally presented to him the edict, signed by the prime minister, authorizing our passage. It was an impressive document, inscribed on heavy, blue, gold-crested paper.

The governor informed us he would have to keep the document for his official files. I hated to give it up, wondering whether it might not be essential at some point farther along, far beyond the reach of telegraph. The governor insisted it would not be necessary, since we would be accompanied all the way to the Chinese border by an officer and several soldiers of his command. To be on the safe side, we photographed the permit before leaving it behind.

At dinner the governor told us what he knew of the way ahead, predicting that we would have no trouble. A band of Chinese pilgrims just in from Kashgar and bound for Mecca had recently crossed the passes on camels, and reported the trails in fair condition. The snows might not come for another month. Also, we would not have to worry about horses and pack animals, for these would be furnished by village headmen along the route. This had been ordered in the edict from Kabul.

It all sounded too good to be true, and we were to discover that none of it was true, but through no fault of the governor's. It was simply that east of Faizabad the law of the land grows weaker and more tenuous with each mile. And misinformation, freely given, is the rule rather than the exception in the Middle East.

We left Faizabad on August 23, the eve of Afghanistan's independence day, after Sawar Khan entertained us with a farewell luncheon plus an hour-long exhibition of local music and dancing.

At the luncheon we met for the first time Cadet (comparable to the rank of second lieutenant in our own army) Syed Rashid, who was to command our escort, and who would be responsible for our safety. Rashid greeted us with a haughty look and a tired handshake. He wore a stiff, visored cap, brightly polished cavalry boots, and a uniform coat heavily padded to hide his narrow shoulders and cinched tightly with a Sam Browne belt to accentuate his wasp waist. He looked like one of the chorus in "The Student Prince."

We left in the governor's station wagon. Franc and I sat in front with the driver, Koshan and Cadet Rashid in the center seats, and two very young, unkempt, amiable soldiers sprawled on the barracks bags and equipment in the rear. The freshly laid road ascended a narrow valley, and we frequently had to get out and push on steep grades. All but Cadet Rashid, that is, pushed. Rashid let it be known immediately that he could not be expected to push, pull, haul, or carry. All this was beneath the dignity of an officer and gentleman of the Afghan army.

At the end of forty-five miles the road ended abruptly against a formidable wall of rock. This was as far as gasoline would take us. The next five hundred miles or more would be on foot, either our own or an animal's. Horses awaited us there at the end of the road, and an hour after dark we reached a temporary camp of the road engineers. We dined, squatting Afghan-fashion, around a tray of chicken and rice. They ate with their fingers, and we followed suit. Ominously it began to rain; our summer weather was behind us.

In the morning Rashid revealed more of his character and temperament. Before the pack animals were loaded, he had picked and mounted the largest and best riding horse. Franc's horse was thin, old, and sickly, scarcely thirteen hands high. The stirrups on the Mongol-type saddle were so short that Franc's

# AFTER YOU, MARCO POLO

knees stuck up higher than the horse's withers. Soon this posture became so uncomfortable that he was forced to kick away the stirrups, and then his feet almost trailed the ground. My horse was a somewhat healthier specimen, although again the stirrups were uncomfortably short.

Koshan's horse looked as if he'd live out the year, and his saddle was padded with so many blankets that it resembled a bed; yet he groaned and winced and bumped along in agony, clutching the saddle horn.

"Are you ill?" I asked him.

"No," he said, "but to tell the truth I'm not accustomed to riding."

"You've ridden before, haven't you?"

"Only once," he said.

"When was that?"

"Last night," he admitted.

Poor Koshan had ridden only long enough to start blisters. I pitied him, but no one could help him now. He would learn to ride—the hard way.

Before dusk it began to rain again. Franc's horse became so weak that he was forced to dismount and lead him. Completely disinterested, Rashid galloped ahead and disappeared from view. It was still raining when we dismounted and led our horses across the deep and swollen Kokcha, and labored in darkness up a rocky hillside to the village of Zebak. We had been in the saddle for thirteen hours.

At Zebak there was no food, and we could not locate Rashid. Zebak's altitude was 8,400 feet, and we were cold as well as wet. I brewed tea for Franc, Koshan, and the two soldiers, and we bedded down for the night in a half-ruined mosque.

We awoke at dawn to find Rashid still missing. Koshan wandered off disconsolately in search, and found the cadet—warm, well-fed, and comfortable—in the home of the local mullah.

But our troubles were only beginning. Koshan informed us that our horses must be returned to the engineers' camp, and the rental on them would be 150 afghanis, please. We told him of

Mr. Rishtya's assurance, confirmed by Mr. Wajid and the governor, that the government would supply the transportation. Koshan appeared surprised. He said that neither he nor Rashid had been informed of this arrangement.

We were furious, as well as worried. We had only 1,000 afghanis with us, and at the rate of 150 afghanis a day rental for transport, we would need much more. We paid, as there was no alternative, but we wondered what obstacle Koshan would think of next. We didn't have to wait long. Soon it became evident that Rashid had not procured horses to continue our journey. Obviously, nobody but the Shors wanted to penetrate the Wakhan.

Upon Franc's insistence, Rashid finally sent for one of the village elders, who kissed the cadet's hand and knelt at his feet while our needs were explained. The old gentleman went off to try to find horses.

In Zebak lived the first Wakhis we met on our trip. They were the poorest people we had ever seen, poorer even than the villagers of China. The men wore goatskins across their shoulders, and the women were clad in filthy rags. The children wore nothing at all. The men, who wore no shoes in summer, waded barefoot through the icy streams and could travel all day over the rugged, rocky terrain at a pace equal to that of a horse. The women aged very rapidly. At thirty they were toothless old crones, and they rarely lived beyond forty. It looked as if neither men nor women in Zebak had ever cut or combed their hair. Except that they carried no clubs or spears, they could have stepped out of a cave—100,000 years ago.

One of the soldiers finally brought word that the horses had been found, and we hurried back to the mosque. The twenty-mile ride from Zebak to Ishkashim, the strong-point of Afghan defenses on the Oxus, took us up a pleasant valley between 15,000-foot peaks. On our right, in the distance, soared an unnamed monarch of the Hindu Kush, more than 24,000 feet high. In the changing light it was beautiful to watch, and my spirits lifted.

A military telephone ran as far as Ishkashim and we were

expected there. Rasul Khan, administrator of the Wakhan district, the local mullah, and the garrison commander greeted us on the edge of the village, and we were shown to the governor's two-room guest house.

We dined with the army commandant, the mullah, and Rasul Khan, the civil administrator. It was the moment to speak of the horses and the money. We had to straighten out our finances before we left Ishkashim, for beyond that point there were no military telephone lines, or any other means of communication.

Rasul Khan assured us that it would be very simple. Koshan should call the governor of Badakshan Province in Faizabad, who would vouch for us, and then the village treasurer would cash a \$100 check and give us 1,400 afghanis, enough to rent animals as far as the Chinese border. We went to bed, feeling confident that our problem was solved. We should have known better. The Afghan thinks like an Oriental. When you are his guest, he tells you what you wish to hear and what will make you happy.

In the morning Koshan was very embarrassed. He had called the governor, as requested, and Sawar Khan had authorized the village treasurer to cash our check. But the village treasurer, a suspicious character, had asked, "Who will vouch for this Koshan? And even if Koshan is truly what he pretends, how do I know he actually talked to the governor? And even if the person on the other end of this instrument said he was the governor, how would this Koshan know he was the governor?

"This man is like a stone," Koshan whispered to us. "If we only had a letter from the King. He is afraid of the King, and would not dare refuse."

"What about the Shah of Persia?" Franc asked.

"I think he might also be afraid of the Shah of Persia."

Franc produced the autographed photo of himself and the Shah standing side by side. The treasurer examined it closely. At last he nodded his head. "Since this man is a friend of the Shah of Persia," he said, "I will accept his check. Assuredly a friend of the Shah is good for 1,400 afghanis."

It took six months for the check to emerge from Afghanistan,

pass through clearing houses on three continents, and finally be honored by our bank in New York. I'll bet the treasurer was worried every minute of the time.

From the time we left Faizabad, no day in the Wakhan passed easily or uneventfully, without arguments and delays. The hostility of nature and the obstacles of the trail did not hamper us as much as the reluctance of our companions. No one else in our party even wanted to be in the area, much less push ahead to the border. Koshan and Rashid, and later the commandant at Sarhad, would have insisted that we turn back if at any time we ever had admitted being ill, or tired, or if our enthusiasm and resolution had once relaxed. Neither Rashid nor Koshan really believed we would dare go all the way.

For eleven dollars a day (in afghanis) we had the use of three riding horses and three pack animals. Rashid and his soldiers requisitioned their horses from the villagers without payment. The Wakhi owners accompanied their stock to the next village. There, they impassively accepted payment and returned to their homes.

Except on rare occasions, we ate off the country. We bought tea and coarse wheat bread for our morning meal. The tea, the poorest quality exported (sticks, twigs, and tea dust pressed into bricks), was strong and bitter. For lunch we simply brewed our own tea and gnawed at bread saved from the morning, or at a travel cake.

At the end of a day Rashid would order the villagers to bring a sheep and slaughter it for the evening meal. We would sit around a fire while the liver, kidneys and heart were grilled on long skewers. These tasty hors d'oeuvres quieted our hunger while the sheep stewed in a huge pot. The sheep, hacked into chunks of about two pounds each, was served in a communal bowl swimming with ghee, with slabs of bread on the side. I never acquired a taste for ghee, but it supplied strength to keep me going.

As a party we progressed with complete ignorance of what

might lie ahead. Franc and I had never before set foot in Afghanistan; Koshan had never before been in northern Afghanistan; the soldiers, patient and good-natured country boys, had never been beyond Faizabad; Rashid had never been beyond Ishkashim; the villagers had rarely been more than a single day's travel east of their own homes.

At Qala Panja two branches of the Oxus meet, one flowing from the Russian border and Lake Victoria, while the other comes down the Wakhan, from the great glaciers and passes of the Pamir plateau.

In four days of travel from Zebak to Qala Panja we had climbed only 500 feet, the road dipping and rising from 8,500 to 9,000 feet. From Qala Panja on, the climb was precipitous, and the thinning oxygen added to our difficulties. Any undue exertion caused us to breathe rapidly, and we tired so quickly it was frightening. For hours we toiled up the side of a rocky cliff, our horses picking their way with probing steps along a narrow ledge. Both Koshan and I were riding mares with foals, and the mares almost had nervous breakdowns trying to guard their young from disaster. The nervousness of the mares infected Koshan. He rode in tense and silent misery.

The few silent people we passed appeared healthy, but their garments, as Marco Polo had related, were mostly skin—their own and the skins of animals.

It was wild country, and eerily beautiful.

At the village of Nurss we were introduced to yaks, which replaced horses as our pack animals. We also rode them on occasion.

Yaks are powerful animals, tall as horses and heavier than steers, with beautiful shining coats varying from black and gray to brindle that are so long they sometimes trail the ground. Their feet are huge cloven hoofs, and they are easy-gaited and surefooted. It is not necessary for a yak to follow the cleared trails. If he desires, he can climb straight up a mountain. He will so desire if he sees some edible grass on a short cut.

But the yak is much more than a beast of burden. To the Kirghiz, and indeed all the tribes of the Pamir Knot, he is a one-animal social-security program. He carries heavy loads, and can be ridden like a horse. His coarse hair is woven into stout cloth for outer garments and small tents. His thick hide makes sturdy boots and thongs for tying tents. The cows give milk so rich that a few shakes turn it into butter. But its milk is scanty and it is not unusual for a Kirghiz tribeswoman to milk forty yaks in a morning. Yak milk, butter, and ghee are mainstays of the tribal diet. The meat makes warkh, a tough but nourishing sausage. The horns are carved into utensils and knife handles. And the animal furnishes the only export which enables the Kirghiz to trade with the outside world—yak tails.

The tail is really the most valuable part of the animal. In India it is prized as a fly whisk. Every proper public official keeps one on his desk. And we found, to our surprise, that great numbers are exported every year to the United States. It seems that there is nothing quite like their long, silky strands for making realistic whiskers for department store Santa Clauses.

Useful a yak may be, but comfortable he is not. His back is as broad as a dining-room table, and to straddle him you must do the split, and remain in that position. Although yaks don't tire easily, when they do, heaven help the rider. A tired yak is one of God's most unmanageable creatures. If he thinks he can get away with it, he will brush you off against the side of a cliff or the trunk of a tree. Or he may leave the trail entirely and set out upon a track of his own choosing, oblivious to your cries, kicks, and jerks on the rope in his nostrils. As for retaliation by kicking or spurring him, you might as well dig your heels into a steel barrel. I have never won an argument with a yak, and that shows how stubborn they are.

Finally, a yak doesn't mind swimming in ice water, which was fortunate, as we spent four hours that morning fording the Oxus, crossing eight separate glacier-fed streams in the mile-wide, stony river bed. It was grueling, and it was dangerous. Our pack yaks struggled and staggered to keep their feet in the racing tor-

rents. The water was frequently over my stirrups, and I balanced atop the saddle with my feet on the horse's neck.

At Baroghil, the last army post in the Wakhan, the commandant, a tall, wide-shouldered man of considerable dignity and quiet strength, had alarming news. Earlier reports of warfare along the Chinese frontier were not exaggerations. There had been ambushes and shooting. The political situation in China was unpredictable. No one knew exactly what was happening, because no travelers had come through in recent weeks. He was concerned for our safety.

From here at Baroghil to the Chinese border post, the trail led across the Pamir plateau at an average elevation of 15,000 feet. On the way we would find no villages, but only the yurts of wild, nomadic Kirghiz. The Kirghiz nominally owed allegiance to Afghanistan, but they crossed at will into China, Russia, and Pakistan, and were contemptuous of all authority. They were fierce and unpredictable people who even in the most peaceful times looted caravans. What they might do to foreigners laden with such valuable equipment as cameras and camping supplies no one could say, for no such party as ours had ever penetrated so far into the Wakhan. Even the commandant himself had never ventured out onto the great plateau, although he had been stationed at Baroghil for two years.

It was the commandant's judgment that we should turn south, across the Baroghil Pass into Pakistan, and then make our way to Chinese Turkestan via the Hunza Valley and the Mintaka Pass, thus avoiding the Pamir plateau entirely. However, he had seen the prime minister's letter. It was an order, and he was a soldier. If we insisted, he would help us take any trail we desired, even if the lives of all of us were in jeopardy. The commandant looked at me, and then he looked at Franc. He said not a word, but I knew his serious glance held this question for Franc: "Do you want to risk her life?"

Franc turned to me and said, "Well, how about it, Jean? You know the danger, and you know your own strength."

So the decision was up to me. We hadn't come thousands of

miles, and spent months in cutting red tape, and endured Koshan and Rashid, and penetrated the Wakhan thus far, just to be stopped by a border war. Whatever happened, I wanted to go on. And I knew Franc felt the same way. All I said was, "Why are we sitting around talking when we should be packing? We've got to get an early start in the morning."

Koshan translated my answer, I believe accurately for a change. The commandant smiled, and grasped my hand in both of his and made a little speech.

"The commandant says he is proud to know you," Koshan interpreted. "He says he will come with us himself as far as the last Kirghiz encampments, and that tonight he will pray our journey be a safe one."

We were up at dawn the next day. The trail east from Baroghil rose almost straight up, over paths of treacherous shifting shale and around sheer rock chimneys. We crossed our first pass at 13,400 feet, and thereafter were rarely below that level, often far above it. Until then, we had not been overly troubled by anoxemia, for our climb had been comparatively gradual. But after we left Baroghil, and approached the Pamir plateau, every unusual exertion—even mounting into the saddle—left me gasping.

The commandant pushed us relentlessly all morning. Even the Wakhis were worn out by noon, when we stopped for tea and bread, and stretched gasping on the rocks like landed fish. The commandant, as we rested, explained that there was a bridge well ahead of us, a most dangerous bridge, that must be crossed before nightfall.

With his constant urging, we reached the bridge at five o'clock. It was about sixty feet long, with a drop of fifty feet to the raging rapids below. Four slender tree trunks, interlaced with branches, formed the longitudinal skeleton, and this was covered with flat rocks, unsecured. The whole structure creaked and swayed when the commandant stepped out on it.

He ordered us to cross one at a time, leading our animals. An argument broke out among the six yak pullers as to which one should try it first. They weren't vying for the honor. I became exasperated, slipped off my horse, grabbed the bridle firmly, and led him out onto the bridge. I could feel it shift and heave under our weight, and I don't recall breathing until I reached the far side.

That ended the arguments, and one of the yak pullers hauled his bellowing animal over. The others followed.

When the commandant ordered a brief, welcome rest on the east bank, Franc scrambled down to the river for a drink. Just as he leaned over, a rock turned beneath his feet, and he tumbled flat on his stomach, arms outstretched, into the freezing water. Much annoyed and thoroughly drenched, he dragged himself up the bank and stripped off the wet clothes. Blue with cold, wrapped in a *chapon*, Franc huddled beside a yak-dung fire.

While we waited for him to thaw, and his clothes to dry, I dug out our map case, so Franc could mark the bridge. After studying the map for a minute he began to laugh hilariously. He had traveled 11,000 miles into the Pamirs just to fall into the River Shor! I thought the coincidence incredible, and showed the map to Koshan. He was not impressed, nor did he think the name unusual. "Shor in Persian means salty," he said. "By any chance did the stream taste salty?"

We started again—straight up! The trail zigzagged up a shale chimney at a pitch close to the perpendicular, the steepest ascent I had ever seen. Less than halfway up we dismounted, as it was obvious the horses could make it only without riders. The horses would climb a few steps, then pause while their knees shook and their heads drooped. The yaks panted and wheezed like ancient freight engines.

One by one, men and animals reached the point of exhaustion, gasping and sobbing. I was riding a contrary and very tired white pony that belatedly developed the habit of bucking when-

ever I smacked her with the quirt. And it was necessary to use the quirt often or else she would have stopped entirely and gone to sleep standing on the trail. It was terrifying, riding a bucking horse on the edge of a 3,000-foot precipice. Finally I dismounted and led the mare, although my legs, too, trembled with fatigue.

Gradually the other horses reached the stage where it was impossible to goad them further, and ultimately we were all on foot. Except Koshan, of course. He found a well-padded yak and added himself to that poor animal's already heavy burden. All our yaks were carrying about 160 pounds, considered the maximum load.

At nine o'clock Franc noticed that I was crying. These were the tears of absolute fatigue. I simply couldn't help it. Franc comforted me, much concerned, but all I could do was sob. Then he asked the commandant when we could stop.

"There is a Kirghiz band," the commandant said, "at a place called Langar. We should reach it by midnight."

The commandant was a shrewd psychologist. We reached Langar, at an altitude of 12,400 feet, in one hour—not three. Since I had steeled myself for the longer haul, that hour was comparatively painless.

On our large-scale maps of the Wakhan, Langar looked like a sizable village. It was a dot somewhat larger than the other dots, that is. Actually, it consisted of two uninhabited, ruined stone huts and two densely populated Kirghiz yurts. Just as we reached the first yurt, the commandant's horse dropped dead. We had been on the trail sixteen hours.

The Kirghiz, the first we had seen, received us hospitably. Here were the hardy, independent, nomadic people who lived in the Russian Pamirs, Chinese Turkestan, or the Wakhan, with little regard for national boundaries.

While the Wakhis are tied by inertia and ignorance to an area that apparently lacks essential ingredients for healthy living, the Kirghiz roam wherever the grazing is best. As a result of their dairy diet, rich in protein and probably containing all the necessary vitamins and minerals, these nomads are among the finest physical specimens in the world, capable of remarkable endurance even at the great heights at which they live. But Franc suggested that—like the yaks—they might not thrive at sea level.

In the morning we struck out straight across the Pamir plateau for Bozai Gumbaz, the largest Kirghiz settlement. Our path led through a lush green bowl-shaped valley, 13,000 feet high, rimmed by 20,000-foot peaks.

Before the sun was at its height we were intercepted by a tall young Kirghiz on a white horse. His enormous fur hat made him look a head taller than Franc, and he wore a Russian overblouse, corduroy britches, and high boots of fine black leather. He introduced himself as Quolan Larh, chief of the valley Kirghiz, and said he would guide us as far as Bozai Gumbaz. "There," he said, "you will meet our leader."

The commandant seemed surprised. He didn't know that the fiercely individualistic Kirghiz acknowledged one leader. They did, the towering Larh insisted, and the name of this leader was Rahman Qul. Perhaps the commandant had heard of him?

The commandant looked unhappy. Yes, he said, he had heard of Rahman Qul. He did not elaborate.

An hour before sundown we reached Bozai Gumbaz where twenty *yurts* were dotted along a clear stream, and women were busy milking a large herd of yaks tethered nearby. Quolan Larh spoke to guards at the doorway of the largest *yurt* we had ever seen, bade us good-by, and rode off. Impassively, the guards bowed us inside.

The diameter of this yurt was at least forty feet. It was carpeted with brilliant Yarkand felts and fine Khotan rugs. Brightly painted metal trunks and chests, some brass-bound and apparently very old, lined the walls.

A half dozen tribesmen, the elders of Bozai Gumbaz, joined us, smiled and bowed in welcome, and we were soon warming ourselves close to the fire, and noisily (therefore politely) sipping bowls of yak-butter tea. Then a man taller than all the rest

entered. This was obviously Rahman Qul, the Kirghiz Khan. We all stood up.

Rahman Qul unslung an Enfield rifle from his shoulder and unbuckled a cartridge belt, from which hung a pistol holster. He pushed back his karakul hat, exposing a broad, balding head, and greeted us in Persian. The commandant introduced himself. While they were extremely polite to each other, one sensed a tension, a bristling between two strong men. Then the commandant nodded in our direction, identifying us as Americans. Rahman Qul smiled, stepped forward, and shook hands.

The Kirghiz Khan, obviously an intelligent and quick-witted man, was elegantly dressed. His knee-high black boots were of the finest leather, and carefully polished. His overblouse was belted and fur-lined, and I had the disturbing thought that it must once have belonged to a Russian officer. Around his neck, under the collar of an American GI shirt, was a lavender scarf of fine Chinese silk. His flat Mongol face, in repose, seemed a bit sinister with its almond eyes and thin mustache drooping around the corners of his mouth. He looked like the Hollywood version of an Oriental villain, though his manner was straightforward and almost friendly.

Koshan explained our presence in Bozai Gumbaz, and emphasized that our journey had the blessing of the King. There was much head-shaking and frowning, with frequent glances in our direction, especially when Koshan mentioned that we were en route to China. Koshan refrained from interpreting what must have been Rahman Qul's objections. Then Qul spoke to two young men seated, silent and cross-legged, in the shadows behind the elders. They went outside, mounted horses, and rode off across the plain at a long lope.

The chief led us to a smaller yurt near his own, explaining through Koshan, that "there had been bad feeling at the border." He had sent out scouts to make a reconnaissance. We would remain his guests until he thought it advisable for us to go on. If he did. We felt that Koshan wasn't telling us the whole story.

When the two scouts returned, followed by five more armed

men, to report to the Kirghiz Khan, we asked Koshan, who had overheard, what news they brought. Koshan hesitated. He, Rashid, and even the commandant looked troubled. When Koshan did reply, he gave us the old lie. "It was about some yak tails."

We feared the worst, and the worst happened. In the morning Rashid, Koshan, and the Baroghil commandant solemnly entered our *yurt*. Kirghiz women brought tea, and we sipped politely, waiting. Koshan dropped the bombshell. The Kirghiz, he reported, had been fighting for two weeks with the Chinese at the border. Everything east of our encampment was a no man's land. Several men had been killed in the past few days. He concluded forcefully: "There is nothing for you to do but turn back. The Kirghiz will not guarantee your safety beyond here."

My instinctive reaction was a blunt, "No!"

"What kind of Chinese are at the border—Nationalists or Communists?" Trust Franc to ask the important question.

"Nationalists," Koshan replied. I sighed with relief.

Franc and I held a serious conference. There could be no doubt that if we went on it might be at the risk of our lives. We talked of the half a world we had already traveled, and of our depleted bank balance. We spoke of Koshan's unwillingness to help us further. Both the Kirghiz and the Afghans seemed to want to get rid of us as quickly as possible. Furthermore, there was a mysterious undercurrent to these discussions that we didn't understand. Certainly Koshan wasn't telling us the whole truth. We both agreed that it would be wiser to turn back. We both agreed to try to go on.

Koshan tried again. "There is great danger," he said. "These tribesmen have no respect for life—not even the lives of soldiers or government officials. Even if you and Mrs. Shor are willing to take the chance, you must think of others. Remember that you have an escort of Afghan soldiers, and that I am an official of the government. Certainly, it would never do to expose an Afghan soldier to an area where there might be shooting! Why, it could provoke an international incident!"

"Nobody's keeping you here," Franc said. "We'll go on alone."

"The Kirghiz," Koshan said, "will not let you."

"I'll believe that," said Franc, "when I hear it from the Kirghiz themselves. I want to talk to Rahman Qul!"

Koshan sighed, shrugged, and walked with us to the chieftain's yurt. Rahman Qul was seated cross-legged before the fire, smoking. He had been expecting us, he said.

Franc made a little speech, earnestly and in a low voice. He spoke very slowly, in the hope that Rahman Qul could not mistake his meaning, should Koshan distort the words. But, to his credit, Koshan interpreted exactly, for once.

"We have traveled more than eleven thousand miles to reach your encampment," Franc said. "We have crossed oceans and deserts and continents. We have spent much money, and months out of our lives. And here, only two days' travel from our goal, we are told we must turn back. I put our lives entirely in your hands. If you can help us reach the Chinese border, we can make our own way from there. From here to the border, we must beg you for animals and a guide. We will pay whatever you ask."

The Kirghiz Khan smiled. He rose and placed both hands on Franc's. "I accept your trust," he said. "I will be responsible for your lives. I can accept no pay. You are my guests. I am only ashamed of the cowardice of your escort, for while I am a Kirghiz, I am also an Afghan."

Rashid looked very unhappy. "I am responsible for the bodies of these people," he said. "I cannot let them go unless I have something in writing."

Rahman Qul considered this demand, and then nodded in agreement. Koshan sat down and wrote half a page of Persian script. Rashid approved it, and it was passed to Qul. The Kirghiz Khan read it carefully, and then signed it. "There is your receipt for the two Americans," he said. Koshan studied the signature, and handed it to Rashid, who tucked it into his wallet. The whole procedure had an air of serious business, con-

ducted in legal fashion. "You are now out of our hands," said Koshan.

I suppressed a small cheer.

That night we carefully counted and packed the last of our emergency rations: two small tins of cheese, two quarter-pound bars of Swiss chocolate, and a small bottle of Bovril, my favorite British beef tea. We thought these would last us for two days. In addition, the Kirghiz had baked for us twelve flat loaves of bread, and left them in a sack at the door of our *yurt*.

We had a last meal that night with Koshan, Rashid, and the commandant. We five had covered some rough ground together, and ordinarily past frictions would have been forgotten at such a time. But we were not sorry to part from them. The commandant I liked best of the three, for he was at least efficient and considerate, although choosing to remain aloof from discussion or involvements. He had carried out his responsibilities as a soldier. Rashid was a mean and insufferable minor-league martinet, and I was glad to see the last of him.

As for Koshan, he had been more exasperating than offensive. He would be overjoyed to get back to the civilization of Kabul—and he would stay there. He agreed to take back our letters, notebooks, and film, and mail them from Kabul. Despite our misgivings, this part of his mission he fulfilled without error.

We rode out of Bozai Gumbaz on the morning of Sunday, September 4, with Tiluh Walduh, a dour Kirghiz guide, and two yak pullers. Tiluh Walduh was Hollywood's version of a Mexican desperado, tall and slender, with smoldering black eyes and a thin drooping handlebar mustache. He was the silent type, and so were the yak pullers, except for their monotonous curses as they prodded, pushed, and pulled. We were not long on the trail when I realized that this part of the tour was going to be without benefit of lively chatter. We could not understand more than five words of Tiluh Walduh's language, and he could not understand one of ours.

An hour's ride out of Bozai Gumbaz, Tiluh Walduh left us.

In sign language he pointed out the path we should take, and then indicated with a wide sweep of his arm that he would go out on the flank, and watch for danger from the hill summits. He loped off across the plain, climbed a ridge, and vanished.

All that day, we had an uncanny feeling of being remarkably little, and alone. The vast emptiness of the Pamirs spread around us. The peaks seemed always in the same place, so distant that we could never leave those behind, or reach those ahead. At noon we stopped in the shade of an overhanging rock for lunch of bread and cheese, and made a disturbing discovery. Our sack of bread had shrunk from twelve to three loaves. During the previous night, someone had "borrowed" nine loaves—the bulk of our provisions. Since the tribesmen of Rahman Qul had all the bread they needed, it was easy to guess that Rashid and his men had "requisitioned" our bread when they left the encampment before dawn, while we still slept.

The simple arithmetic of our food supply was not encouraging. Five people must exist for two days on an arduous trail with three flat loaves and a goatskin bag of pasty Kirghiz cheese, plus our skimpy emergency rations. The yak pullers carried the cheese, made from leftover yogurt rolled into balls and dried in the sun. It was called *karut* and tasted like cheese-flavored putty. It was necessary that they share our bread, just as it was necessary that we share their cheese, although nothing complimentary could be said about it except that it was better than having an empty stomach. Nor could we turn back for more provisions, even had we wished, for somewhere ahead Tiluh Walduh patrolled our route.

At dusk Walduh appeared out of nowhere, signaling silently that all was well. We camped on the bank of a stream, brewed tea, and shared the second flat wheel of bread. While we slept, the Kirghiz took turns standing watch.

The next day passed in the same fashion—hours of silent progress through a silent land. We paused at noon to divide our last loaf. Then, at sundown, one of the yak pullers urged his animal into a trot, drew up with us, and pointed to a notch in the mountain wall two miles ahead. "Wakhjir," he said. "Wakh-

jir!" Franc put an arm around me and squeezed my shoulders. I must have cheered. The Wakhjir Pass—end of the Wakhan. Through that pass, 16,000 feet above sea level, lay China. We had made it—the first foreigners in modern times to reach China on the ancient route of Marco Polo! We kicked our tired horses until they trotted.

Suddenly, less than a mile from the pass, a low, clear whistle sounded through the still evening air. We stopped, expecting to see Walduh materialize. Our yak pullers dragged their animals toward us, signaling for us to dismount. Puzzled, we swung out of the saddle.

The Kirghiz led all the animals into a little gully, and we followed, mystified. In a few minutes Tiluh Walduh joined us. He seemed tense and strained. At his direction we crept around a rock at the mouth of the gully and he pointed upward to the crest between us and the pass. Silhouetted against the darkening sky were three Chinese soldiers. That, we knew, would be the vanguard of a patrol.

We squatted there, discussing our predicament. All the whispered conferences at Bozai Gumbaz, and Koshan's evasions and equivocations, took on fresh meaning. It looked as if this "border dispute" was a small war. Tiluh Walduh was not going to take another step toward China. Yet our credentials were in order. There was no reason for the Chinese to harm us.

"Suppose we walk on alone?" I suggested.

"You're not going to look like an American girl from up there," Franc said. "You're just going to look like a target."

On the Central Asian borders, it is quite customary to shoot first and identify the bodies later. Even when there isn't a feud, or border dispute, or war, or whatever was going on here.

The Chinese were beyond shouting distance, and yet we found ourselves whispering. Our lives were in danger because of our escorts, and yet we could not leave them. We dared not go ahead alone; in fact we couldn't go anywhere alone. We were helpless, we were stopped dead in our tracks. There was nothing to do but obey Walduh.

We sat quietly beneath the bank until dark. It was bitterly

cold as we remounted and turned our backs on the Wakhjir. My heart was cold, also. I was stunned and bitter.

After a mile we left the trail by which we had come, and struck out toward the south. I told Franc, hopefully, that at least we weren't headed back for Bozai Gumbaz. Perhaps Walduh knew a detour and would sneak us past the patrol and through the pass.

"Maybe," Franc said. "I don't know where we're headed."

At dawn Walduh let us stop for a few hours' rest. I slid off my horse and collapsed on the spot. When I awoke, Franc was studying our maps.

Franc thought we were possibly fifteen miles south and a little west of the Wakhjir, but it was just a guess. So much of our progress was up, down, or around mountains that it was impossible to estimate straight-line distances.

That afternoon we toiled endlessly up a mountainside, dismounting often to lead our horses over steep shale inclines. Sometimes the shale gave way beneath our feet, and as we slid backward, a shower of stones crashed into the canyons below. On that day there were no paths or level ground. The scenery may have been glorious. I don't know. All my concentration was on moving ahead, and I seldom took my eyes from my feet.

Just before dark we began to climb an even steeper ridge. About two thousand feet above, the trail dipped into a grassy hollow. In the center of this remote and tiny valley stood a single small yurt, two horses, and the biggest yak we had ever seen. Three children, one an eight-year-old girl in a red dress, one a nude boy of four, were playing tag around the yak. This, I thought, is truly the end of the earth. Here are people living in a valley with no name, set in a range of uncharted mountains. Yet I was glad to be there.

A fierce, tattered Kirghiz, an ancient rifle resting in his arms and a long knife hanging bare at his side, stood beside the low door. Tiluh Walduh shouted to him, and several times we heard the name "Rahman Qul." The man nodded as if accepting orders, and finally lowered his gun. He signaled to us to dismount, and led us inside.

The interior of the *yurt* reflected the solitude and poverty of its owner. It was the only dirty Kirghiz habitation I have ever seen. A naked baby grubbed in the filth near the fire. As we entered, a wrinkled hag came from behind the reed partition, bent like a witch, with a face evil and twisted and filthy. The old harridan, either the man's mother or mother-in-law, controlled the household by sheer venom and viciousness. Trailing after her was an apathetic younger woman, mother of the children.

We kept waiting for food. Even mutton and ghee would have been acceptable. A few days earlier I had gagged at the thought of this greasy dish. Now I craved it. But there was no mutton and ghee, nothing was offered. We broke out our unfinished tin of cheese. We shared it with the Kirghiz family, and grandmother demanded more. She didn't get it.

Although there was no mutton and ghee for supper, the Kirghiz family did brew a pot of yak-butter tea. The yurt was warm and relaxing, and we spread our sleeping bags and crawled in. Everyone else lay down to sleep, heads against the outside felt wall, feet toward the fire, like spokes of a huge wheel. It was very cold, and we spread our chapons on top of us. Our silent, harassed, henpecked host was the last to retire. Before he lay down, he lifted my feet and carefully tucked the chapon under and around them. He did the same for Franc. Even in an atmosphere poisoned by the old woman there still existed a spark of kindness.

We breakfasted on hot yak milk and a bowl of yogurt. The yaks were packed, and then we received a final blow. Tiluh Walduh approached Franc, bowed low, took both his hands, and said a polite "Salaam." In Afghanistan "salaam" can mean either hello or good-by. In this case there could be no doubt—it meant good-by.

We were stunned.

Walduh pointed to the man of the yurt, and in sign language indicated that he would be the one to guide us on. Then, with no further explanation, he mounted his horse and rode away toward the north, where lay the domain of Rahman Qul.

I can't describe our dismay at seeing him depart. He was our last link with anyone we knew, or who knew anything about us —our whereabouts, our purpose, our destination. Up to now, we had been passed on from one protector to another, starting with the King, in Kabul, extending through the commandant at Baroghil to Rahman Qul, and finally to Tiluh Walduh. But the chain of responsibility had broken. If anything happened to us now, if we simply disappeared, it would be months before the news filtered back to Kabul—if it ever did.

The Kirghiz, on foot, led our little procession. Franc and I rode immediately behind, on the horses loaned by Rahman Qul. To our rear the two yak pullers urged on their animals.

Our guide carried a goatskin packed with yak cheese, and a wheel of bread. We were down to one tin of cheese, the Bovril, and two bars of chocolate. As the horses climbed at their methodical pace, I felt giddy and lightheaded. I laughed without reason. The mountain pinnacles wavered and reeled. I may have needed oxygen. Certainly I needed food. The first agony of real hunger perhaps resembles an addict's craving for opium. I couldn't tear my mind away from food.

Once, when I felt I had reached the limit of my endurance, I shouted for a halt. My horse, equally exhausted, stood behind me with spraddled legs and lowered head. He didn't even try to bite me. But the Kirghiz, refusing to halt even for an instant, continued his steady climb, ignoring me. We had to keep up with him, or fall behind and get hopelessly lost. We kept up.

We came at last to a miniature plateau where patches of stunted grass grew, fit for grazing the famished horses. Here the guide called a halt, and shared his loaf of bread and mushy cheese with us. For dessert we split a bar of chocolate five ways, and then we reclined against a stony bank to contemplate what lay ahead.

Above us stretched a mile-wide snow field. At its pinnacle was a sheer and forbidding wall of white, perhaps two hundred yards high. Beyond that we concluded there must be a summit, although the summit of what we did not know.

For four hours we fought our way up that slippery, frozen field. Beneath six inches of snow was a layer of ice, and from somewhere far below we could hear the gurgle of running water. Time after time the burdened, straining yaks, despite their broad hoofs, broke through the icy crust and floundered helplessly until we pulled and shoved them out. Our dainty-footed horses avoided the soft spots as if by instinct.

We were numbed by exhaustion, but crawled on. I don't know where the strength came from. There truly are hidden reservoirs in the human body that can be tapped only in the most desperate emergency. Even when the mind is ready to give up, the body insists on living.

We were progressing only a few yards at a time, then lying with our faces in the snow, recovering from the effort of the brief advance, and waiting for another bit of strength so we could crawl a few yards farther. Finally, as I scratched my way upward, it seemed easier. I tried to rise to my feet, and was startled to find that I could. Franc rose at my side. We stood together on the roof of the world.

We stood on the crest of a great mountain range, on a stony ridge swept clear of snow by constant wind. All around us, as far as the eye could see, soared endless mountain chains. Ahead was the Karakoram Range; beyond, the Himalayas. On either side, and behind us, lay the Hindu Kush. Magnificent peaks punctuated the endless distance. We looked, in silence and in awe. Though exhausted and gasping, we could not take our eyes from the majestic panorama.

Finally, I asked Franc, "Where do you think we are?"

"At the top of something," he answered helpfully. "That's all I know."

We rested at the crest for thirty minutes. The visibility was incredible. Surely I shall never see such an evening again. The sun's dying rays coated the summits with gold, and purple shadows were falling in the valleys. Our guide beckoned to us and pointed to a waist-high cairn. Here he placed a stone, as had those other unfortunates who had crossed before us. Franc and

I followed suit, feeling the strangeness of performing this little ritual on an unknown pass.

One of our yak pullers placed his stone on the cairn, but the other hesitated, and then suddenly threw his aside. Without a word, he turned and fled down the snow field, back in the direction we had come. The grade was so steep that his steps were enormous, and as he gathered speed and leaped crevasses his footprints came ever farther apart.

"There," said Franc, "goes the Abominable Snowman."

We yelled at him, but of course he paid no heed. Our guide made no attempt to stop him, and thereafter pulled the second yak himself. Now we had one less mouth to feed, but the boy's desertion made us uneasy about the guide and the remaining yak puller. If they too deserted before we reached some habitation or encountered another human, starvation would be inevitable in this high and icy waste.

The dying sun reddened, and it suddenly got much colder. With signs we asked the guide to show us the path onward. To our horror he pointed straight down the snowy mountainside directly in front of us. We would have to slide for about two thousand feet before the ground leveled. There was no possibility of riding or walking. The angle looked to be about sixty-five degrees.

For us to go over this precipice, bone-weary and starved, at the end of three days of cruel travel, seemed like madness. We hung back, looking around for an alternate route, but could see none. Our guide chose to wait no longer. He shrugged, grabbed the nose rope of the nearest yak, and leaped off into space.

The yak bellowed, braced his front legs, and slid off into the void after the Kirghiz. The heavy animal, sliding on its haunches and breaking through the heavy snow, acted like a sea anchor, slowing the descent of the guide. A plume of snow followed them down. Immediately, the remaining yak puller followed with the second pack animal in tow.

Franc and I stood speechless—and alone—on the crest. I had never seen anything like that slide. The thought of doing it my-

self was as frightening as being told to make a parachute jump from a jet plane, or walk a tightrope across a canyon.

I had fussed earlier about being left behind, on the down side of the big crevasse. Now I got my reward. "Ladies first," said Franc. "Over you go!"

I will not say that he pushed me. But over I went, hanging to Nipper's reins, and digging my heels through the stiff crust into the snow beneath. It was like being the center stone in a small avalanche. With a heavy horse sliding at my shoulder, I dared not brake too sharply with my heels, and yet I dared not slide too fast lest I lose the reins and plunge unchecked to the bottom. A spray of snow filled my eyes and mouth. Franc, who took off right behind me, was having similar troubles. It was a wild and dangerous way to descend a mountain. Any well-organized expedition would have found a way to traverse the slope with safety and decorum. But at that point we were not exactly well organized. In fact we weren't even an expedition.

We did not slide the full two thousand feet at once, as I had feared. Small ledges, unseen from the top, stopped us every few hundred feet, so that we had time to stand up, wipe the snow from our eyes, and feel for broken bones before taking off again. All the downhill progress was on our rears, and it took almost an hour to reach a fairly level stretch of ground.

When we could stop and catch our breath for a moment, before following our guide in a zigzag path downward, my shaky knees simply collapsed under me. Only my hold on Nipper's bridle kept me from pitching headfirst down the rock-strewn slope. Franc, who had nearly lost a wife, turned and called, "Better stand up. We've got a long way to go." He knew better than to soften me up with too much sympathy, but I could have used a little.

We worked our way down a rubble wall pushed up by a long glacier that filled the valley in front of us. Long after dark we paused beside a glacial stream. The Kirghiz pointed to the frozen ground—our bed for the night. We gouged a shelf out of the shale, as protection against the wind, and tethered the horses

and yaks. There was nothing on which these weary and pitiful animals could graze, and we had nothing to feed them.

The Kirghiz sat on their heels, moody and silent, while Franc and I collected ancient chips of yak dung and built a fire. The flame burned blue in the thin air, just as Marco Polo had noted in the High Pamirs. An accurate observer, that Polo.

We divided our last tin of cheese, a half bar of chocolate, and brewed some tea. The Kirghiz ate our food, but offered none of their *karut* in return. Their attitude had begun to change in an ominous manner. The yak puller was sure we were hiding bread from him. He looked into the empty bag, and muttered at us. The guide demanded one of Franc's last cigars. He didn't get a whole cigar, but Franc let him have alternate puffs.

Except for a half bar of chocolate, the Bovril, and a handful of *karut* in the yak-puller's goatskin, our food supply was exhausted. The loss of those nine loaves of bread in Bozai Gumbaz now loomed as a major catastrophe. We had no idea how far we would have to go before securing fresh provisions. We had eaten only when necessary, and then sparingly, but now almost all the food was gone.

As the fire dwindled, black clouds slid across the moon. We crawled into our sleeping bags. I closed my eyes and was drifting into sleep when something like a cold, wet feather brushed across my face. Winter had caught up with us. It was snowing.

Around midnight I heard Franc stirring and mumbling in what I thought was a nightmare. He had wakened very thirsty, with a terrific headache and pains that shot through his chest. He had not wanted to awaken me, and so had stayed in his bag, reaching a hand out through the opening, and quietly quenching his thirst with snow.

We awoke before dawn, cold and wet and miserable. Two inches of wet snow covered everything. Our boots were full of it, the Kirghiz were soaked, the horses shivered, the saddles were clammy. When Franc said, "I feel lousy," and told me what had occurred in the night, I felt his head. It was very hot. We had a few aspirin left, and I popped two into his mouth,

praying that it was just a cold. We didn't eat anything, or try to light a fire. We just wanted to get out of that place.

At noon we stopped for an hour beside a clear brook, at a spot where there was grass for the horses. They had not eaten for a day and a half, and were growing weak. When Franc dismounted, his face was deathly pale, and he was having a chill. He wobbled over to a tree and leaned against it, as if afraid to sit down for fear he could not rise. The guide and yak puller observed his condition, and drew their own ugly conclusions. Where they had been only surly and grumbling before, now they became arrogant and deliberately rude.

Franc slowly sagged to the ground. I insisted he drink a little hot tea, and wrapped his *chapon* around his shoulders. When he shakily lit a cigar the guide demanded one for himself. Franc found another, but it was slightly damaged, as they all were. The guide took it contemptuously, rolled it in his fingers, and demanded a better one. Franc got to his feet, swaying like a tree in the wind, but still looking impressively tall. In a few phrases which needed no translation, he told the guide what he thought of him. The Kirghiz lowered his eyes sullenly. While conscious and on his feet, Franc was still boss.

I got him into the saddle quickly after that, and rode at his side whenever possible. We were finally on a trail of sorts. It was narrow and dangerous, but people had passed this way before. Often there yawned a thousand-foot drop straight down the cliff, but I wasn't afraid for Franc so long as he could stick on his horse. The horses instinctively knew mountains better than we.

About four o'clock we came upon a low stone hut, twelve feet square and less than five feet high. It was not a human habitation but an abandoned sheepfold. Here I called a halt, although the guide grumbled and pointed ahead, even threatening to go without us. Franc needed shelter quickly, for a cold wind was rising. I still had no idea what was wrong with him, but I knew that if we stayed on the trail any longer, whatever it was might be complicated by pneumonia, if it wasn't pneumonia already.

The dirt floor of the sheepfold was littered with dried dung.

Lighting one of the candles from the bazaar in Faizabad, and working rapidly, I swept out a dry corner with a cedar branch. There I spread Franc's sleeping bag and helped him crawl in. He was pitifully grateful and apologetic for his weakness. I took his temperature. It was 102.6. At that altitude—it must have been at least 15,000 feet—any temperature is bad, and 102.6 in an adult could be dangerous indeed. I searched through our medicine kit, and found two bottles—sulfaguanidine and Chloromycetin. The sulfa was chiefly for dysentery, but I wasn't sure about the Chloromycetin. It was supposed to cure all sorts of virulent diseases, so I gave him two of those tablets and the last two aspirin, hoping I was doing the right thing.

He washed the pills down with snow water and immediately had a violent chill. Whatever his malady, it would have to run its course before we could go further. While I worked, the Kirghiz sat cross-legged at the far side of the fold and watched in stony-faced silence.

We had to have a fire. I had noticed chips of wood and sticks outside, and while bringing in an armful, motioned to the Kirghiz that they should do the same. They sat immovable, except that the guide turned his head away, as if to emphasize his lack of interest. The need for a fire was too urgent for me to argue. I kindled one with sheets from our notebook, and then went outside in the gathering storm to collect as much fuel as I could find. I stacked it inside the hut.

By then the guide and the yak puller were eating lumps of their crude cheese. I started to ask for some, but thinking that they might refuse, and not wanting to lose face or antagonize them, I kept silent. All they had to do was walk out, saddle the horses, and ride away. That would have settled things.

A dozen times in the past few days I had been tempted to open the Bovril, but always something had stopped me. Now, that blessed little bottle was worth more to me than a bucket of rubies from the Shah of Persia's treasure. I heated water and made strong beef tea, lowering it gently to Franc's mouth. He gagged and turned his head, protesting that he didn't want anything. But he managed to drink half a cupful.

The Kirghiz, who had been watching and sniffing, now demanded what was left of the Bovril. The guide reached arrogantly for the pot. I drew back my arm as if prepared to throw the steaming liquid in his face. He lowered his hand. I drank it myself.

Franc saw what was going on and struggled to get out of his sleeping bag. I made him lie down, not a very difficult feat as he was so weak. I could handle the Kirghiz, I told him.

"Are you sure?" he whispered hoarsely.

"I am sure." It was not bravado. I was sure.

Franc lay back in the bag, shivering. "This fever is crawling into my brain. If I get delirious, make those bastards sit on me and hold me down. Whatever you do, don't let me get out and wander around in the snow."

When it grew dark I lit another candle; the first one was almost gone. I gave Franc two more Chloromycetin tablets, and made him drink more Bovril.

Each half hour I took his temperature until it reached 104.6. I had read that no one could survive a fever of more than 104 at such a height. With a fever, the metabolism rate is increased, and oxygen is burned at a faster rate. In this rarefied atmosphere, Franc couldn't absorb enough oxygen to appease the fever. In addition, he was rapidly becoming dehydrated. The combination could kill him. His skin was dry, his lips swollen and cracked. He grew so hot that he threw off the rug and untied the lacing of his sleeping bag.

I tried to think of something, anything that might help. I shook our empty canteens, pleading with the Kirghiz to find water. They ignored me. Reluctantly I left Franc for a few minutes to find a stream murmuring in the darkness. Luckily it was nearby.

I bathed his head and wrists with this glacial water, and then tried to move him as far from the fire as possible. I tugged at him, submerged under the mountain of sleeping bags, but didn't have the strength. I couldn't budge him. I appealed to the two men for help. Their eyes were expressionless, but they were almost smiling. They made no move. Then it struck me: certainly

they were hoping Franc would die! They were waiting like vultures. And I recalled again what Marco Polo had said of certain men of the High Pamirs: "Amidst the highest of these mountains there live a tribe of savage, ill-disposed, and idolatrous people, who subsist upon the animals they can destroy, and clothe themselves with the skins."

The Kirghiz were figuratively waiting for our skins. Our sleeping bags, our clothing, the prized rug, the cameras, the Chinese silver taels and British gold, these comprised a treasure hoard beyond the wildest dreams of these primitive nomads. And it would not be murder, exactly. They had only to wait for Franc to die. Then they could easily pack the yaks, saddle the horses, and ride away with their loot. While there were two of us, we might escape, but a woman alone, stunned by death, would be helpless. At Bozai Gumbaz they could claim that I had died also. This most certainly would be true, in due time.

Franc began to moan and stir. He sat up, his eyes bright and staring. He tried to fight his way out of the sleeping sack, but I forced his hands away and tied it shut. Then I sat on him. I took his wrists in my hands and shouted at him. I don't know what words I used. I was pleading for him to lie still. He only struggled the harder, and he is a powerful man. I found myself tossed about as if on a bucking horse. I held on. Finally he gasped and became quiet, and I sobbed and collapsed against the wall. My hope and spirit were all but gone.

It was after midnight that he began to writhe beneath the sleeping bag. I stroked his head and found it wet. He was perspiring!

Suddenly the fever broke, and minute by minute thereafter I could see life and reason and strength returning to my husband. He relaxed and dozed, breathing more easily. I fought against sleep, for the Kirghiz were still awake, still waiting. I covered Franc carefully. He was so wet that I dreaded another chill. I built up the fire. I wiped his face. But my mind began to wander, and finally I slept. After perhaps twenty minutes I awoke suddenly. I was relieved to find the Kirghiz asleep at last, and Franc

too. I moved the surviving candle so that it would light up the Kirghiz, slumped in the opposite corner. Then I slept, leaning against the jamb of the door. If I lay down, I would sleep too soundly, but in this position I could only cat-nap, and neither Franc nor the Kirghiz could get out without waking me.

I was awake at first light, refreshed. It would be a clear, cold day. Franc was swimming in perspiration, and awake. While his face appeared pale under the beard, his eyes were alert, and he was back with me. He even managed a smile. His temperature read only 102.2.

I nudged the Kirghiz awake with my boot. They sat up, startled, and looked over at Franc, confidently expecting he would be unconscious. Instead, Franc greeted them with a few terse words and a cold and steady stare. Their attitude took another, almost visible, change. Their coveted treasure, and my nightmare, had vanished with the sun. They were no longer emboldened vultures, but a sullen guide and a shambling yak puller. Franc was boss again, and he was eager to be off.

It was dangerous for Franc to travel while he still had fever and was terribly weakened, but we had no choice. No food remained except our half jar of Bovril. The shrunken goatskin of the Kirghiz lay on the floor, limp and empty.

It took all Franc's strength and mine to get him up on his horse, but when he steadied in the saddle he looked quite fit. He was a welcome sight for my tired eyes. At 7:30 we started down again I knew not where—Afghanistan, Pakistan, or China—but I was determined to stop at the first inhabited place and send for help. For that mission, the gold sovereigns would certainly suffice.

The trail led downhill, and soon we were below the snow line. My spirits soared optimistically: this was our lucky day! Then, we followed a shallow stream to a wide river bed which we crisscrossed many times.

The river widened and we found ourselves following a trail along an abrupt cliff. Soon I could look down a thousand feet simply by glancing over my horse's shoulder.

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The Kirghiz had suddenly become quite helpful and I wondered whether the guide's more cordial attitude coincided with our nearing some place where we would find authority.

We came upon it without warning, rounding a hazardous hairpin turn. A half mile below, a square stone fort, complete with battlements, towers, and embrasures, stood in a green valley. It looked, from our height, like a child's castle. Farther on, stone houses lined the river.

In high excitement, we urged our horses down the steep grade, ignoring the danger of the precipice. We crossed the river on a stout log bridge, so exuberant over finding an inhabited place that for the moment we forgot the hard days past, Franc's illness, our weariness, and our hunger.

Five minutes later we reined up beside a canvas tent. Soldiers stepped out—tall, slender, well-uniformed men. I looked up at the fort and recognized the green-and-white flag of Pakistan.

Pakistan!

I was bewildered and disappointed. I had thought it would be China! Certainly our guide had been instructed to take us to the Chinese frontier. After our trouble at the border, we expected to be led over an encircling route that would eventually bring us out in the vicinity of the Wakhjir.

These Pakistani soldiers, while courteous and friendly, spoke little English. They couldn't enlighten us as to where we were, exactly, or how we had gotten there. I learned only that the name of the fort was Kalam Darchi.

The soldiers inspected our passports and found them in order. Suddenly I was thankful that we had secured Pakistan visas in Kabul—just in case. The Kirghiz had no passports, and I found myself worrying about their status. At that moment, I couldn't bear anyone ill will. The soldiers, in their few words, said that since the men were with their own pack animals they could continue with us as far as the first village. They motioned down the road. "Bungalow," the corporal said. "In bungalow men speak English."

A bit farther along the trail we encountered a caravan that had just come down from Kashgar, in Chinese Turkestan. Franc hailed the leader, a Moslem Chinese, and they held a long conversation. The trader asked where we were bound and Franc told him Urumchi. He smiled and said, "You are Americans, are you not?"

Franc admitted as much.

"If you're going to Urumchi," the caravan leader said, "you'd better hurry. The Communists hold all of Eastern China and the western provinces will certainly fall soon. Mao Tze-tung has been proclaimed premier, and Peiping is the new Communist capital."

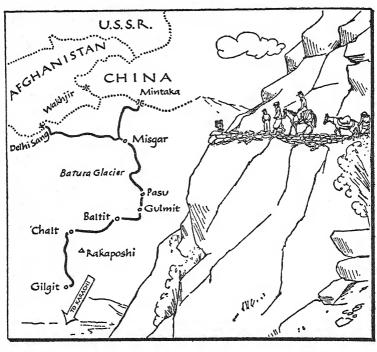
We were stunned. It did not seem possible that the Nationalists could have crumpled so fast. Still, we might be able to reach Urumchi and then head south into India, thus avoiding Communist-held territory.

We asked more immediate questions. Where were we? What was the name of the village?

"It is a place called Misgar," the trader said, obviously surprised. "Do you not know that you are in Hunza!"

I gasped in amazement. The fabulous Hunza Valley!

In China and in England and in Afghanistan we had heard incredible stories of the principality of Hunza, said to be the true Shangri-La. In a single day, and by lucky accident, we had dropped from the lonely, barren, cruel land of rock and ice into an earthly paradise.



8

# **HUNZA**

THE PRINCIPALITY of Hunza is a state of mind, induced by matchless scenery paired with proud and friendly people. It is more than a hundred miles long and often less than half a mile wide. Its river is a twisting silver ribbon hung with gold-and-emerald fields and orchards of flecked jade, the whole encased against intruders between some of Asia's highest mountains. When we slid into the western tip of this valley from Afghanistan, we knew little about Hunza, except that it was ruled by a man bearing the improbable title of Mir, that Pakistan took care of its foreign affairs and defense, and that it was not only odd in shape but odd in character. Or it may be that the rest of the world is odd, and the 25,000 happy Hunzukuts normal. The rest

of the world has more than its share of troubles, the Hunzukuts almost none.

The land is incomparably beautiful. The arable soil of the valley slopes is terraced and watered, while all around rise the peaks of the Karakoram, twice as tall as the Alps. From the fort of Kalam Darchi to Misgar we rode for two hours through carefully tended fields of millet and orchards of apricots and apples. The riverbank was so lush with flowers that the air was heavy with scent. Everyone we met smiled a "salaam."

Misgar's fifty clean stone houses were clustered on both sides of a tributary stream. At the first building, a combination telegraph and telephone office, a tall, slender, handsome man greeted us in English as warmly as if he were an innkeeper and we were old friends with reservations. His name was Nabi Khan, and he was Misgar's chief of communications. He led us across the bridge connecting the two halves of the village, and to a two-room bungalow perched jauntily on the edge of a chasm. We would find such a guest house in every village in Hunza, he said. They had been built by the present ruler's grandfather. While very few foreigners had come to Hunza in recent years, the bungalows were always kept ready.

The bungalow consisted of two scrubbed, whitewashed rooms, each with a corner fireplace, and a bathroom with a large, square stone to sit on while sponging from buckets. Across the front of the bungalow ran a veranda from which we could admire the incomparable view. Hunzukuts, we were to learn, were justly proud of their spectacular country and a porch was their substitute for a picture window.

The two Kirghiz evidently were anxious to leave. In sign language we suggested that they rest overnight, but they vehemently refused. While the horses and yaks grazed hungrily, the men went into the village and returned with cheese and bread. Franc paid them generously, something they obviously did not expect. Then Franc brought out his last two cigars, mashed and cracked, which I repaired with band-aids and handed over as a parting gift.

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Now that we were safe, the memory of our ordeal faded like a nightmare, and it was difficult to hold a grudge. Puffing their Havanas, riding the tired but still willing horses, and leading the unburdened yaks, the Kirghiz departed for their High Pamir homeland. We waved and shouted a farewell, but the Hunzukuts watched them leave in silence and suspicion.

A young man entered the bungalow and in good English introduced himself as Sholam, Misgar's schoolteacher and postal inspector. He wore the distinctive stocking cap of white wool which is standard attire for the Hunza male.

When Sholam helped orient us on our maps, we made two surprising discoveries. Running my finger from Fort Kalam Darchi to the west and north, I found that the pass we had crossed was the Delhi Sang—more than 20,000 feet high! No wonder we suffered as we clawed our way up that snow field!

When we showed the route to Sholam he said, "Very difficult and very high. It is only used by a few Kirghis who know the best way across. You are very fortunate to be here."

The second discovery was even more disturbing.

The village mayor, or *arbab*, joined us on the veranda. He was a handsome man in his sixties—the prime of life in Hunza—erect and strong, with a fine henna beard. Sholam, translating, told of our crossing the Delhi Sang. The *arbab* nodded, surprised, and said: "Those Kirghiz you came with belong to the tribe of Rahman Qul?"

"Yes," Franc said. "Rahman Qul is a good friend of ours—a remarkable man."

The mayor shook his head. "Rahman Qul is a very bad man," he declared. "He robs caravans. He kills many people. Very bad, very cruel."

We stared in disbelief. And then he told us a few tales about our benefactor. Two years before, Rahman Qul and his tribe had crossed into the Russian Pamirs. There they had looted a caravan and murdered everyone in it. Pursued by the Russians, they had fled into Chinese Turkestan and taken up residence near the border post of Mintaka.

Qul had become a close friend of the commander of the Chi-

nese border garrison. Life is dull in such an isolated post, and the Chinese must have enjoyed the companionship of the intelligent Kirghiz Khan. Less than a month before we met him, Qul had invited the commander and his garrison of eight to dine at the Kirghiz encampment on the Mohammedan feast of Id, an occasion of banqueting and friendship. While the Chinese were seated in the big yurt, eating roast sheep with the tribesmen (just as we had), the Kirghiz had suddenly turned on their guests and slaughtered them all.

"For many years this Rahman Qul murders and robs people," the arbab continued. "Why he no murder you?"

We looked at Sholam and the mayor and could only shake our heads. We had no idea why Rahman Qul had treated us so honorably. Now, after much thought, we have a theory. Had Rahman Qul harmed us, his position in Afghanistan would have been as untenable as it already was in China and Russia. He would have had no place of sanctuary. So he sent us off to the border, and the outnumbered Afghans back to Faizabad. But perhaps it was something less practical. Perhaps there is a touch of Robin Hood in every highwayman.

That day our Dakh runner dashed off to the telegraph office with our passports, and returned with a note. It was painstakingly addressed to "Mr. G. D. Bowie, Camp, Misgar."

The design of an American passport leaves a great deal to be desired, particularly in areas where little or no English is spoken, and again there had been confusion.

Occasionally border officials tried to read our passports upside down. Many times, particularly in China, they read them from back to front. Invariably there was confusion over the front page, where the local official confidently expected to find the traveler's name, but instead was faced with the name of some relative who was to be notified "in case of death or accident." Often it proved very misleading.

My father's name, G. D. Bowie, and Franc's mother's name, Mrs. R. G. Klein, thus confronted the telegraph operator in Misgar as he penned his note.

Addressed to Mr. G. D. Bowie, it read: "Would you take tea

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with me at my residence at four o'clock? Please bring your lady companion, Mrs. R. G. Klein. (signed) A. N. Khan." The delicacy of that "lady companion" delighted us. We sent the runner back with an acceptance, and an explanation that we were legally wed.

That afternoon, when we met for tea, Franc asked, "Tell us about the Mir, how does he govern? Does he visit each village regularly? And by the way, where are the soldiers and police?"

Nabi Khan laughed. "There are no police," he said, "because there is no crime. Therefore there are no jails. Nor does Hunza have an army. The soldiers you saw in Kalam Darchi are all Pakistanis, and they are the only soldiers in Hunza, here only because Kalam Darchi is a strategic frontier stronghold. A few years ago the Mir had a small bodyguard, but he disbanded it. Why should he have a bodyguard? He has no enemies."

Each village elects its own arbab, Nabi Khan explained, who governs with a council of elders. The arbab arbitrates all community disputes, mostly over water rights. But when a dispute arises that cannot be settled locally, the arbab telephones the Mir. In a matter of great moment, such as a dispute over an inheritance, the interested parties can petition the Mir in person. All they have to do is walk to Baltit.

"Actually," said Nabi, "the Mir governs by telephone. There is a telephone in every village. Once a day the *arbab* must call the Mir and tell him what's going on. You should have heard our *arbab* report on your arrival yesterday. He hasn't had news like that in years.

"As I said, they all call the Mir—all but one. One *arbab* is so long-winded and so dull that his phone has been fixed so he cannot make outgoing calls. On occasion, the Mir calls him."

The much discussed telephone rang at that moment. Nabi answered, listened for a moment, and then handed it to Franc. "For you, Mr. Shor."

Franc picked up the old-fashioned instrument and a voice greeted him in cultivated English: "Welcome to our country, Mr. Shor. If we had known you were coming, your bungalow

would have been better prepared. Is there anything we can do for you?"

Assuming that the voice belonged to a British official in the Hunza service, Franc asked whether there was any late news from central and western China, and explained that Urumchi was still our destination.

The English-speaking voice said that Turkestan was gradually falling to the Communists, and that he had received word in a recent communiqué from Kashgar that the American consul, his wife, and staff were preparing to flee Urumchi. Franc relayed this disturbing news to me. I thought of what faced Hall and Vincoe Paxton, whom we had not seen since our honeymoon trip to Sinkiang.

Franc explained our trip, and said we still hoped to cross the Mintaka Pass and again pick up the trail of Marco Polo. Perhaps we could only get as far as Kashgar. In that case, we might meet the Paxtons and come out with them.

The voice warned that it might be dangerous to attempt it, but of course he would not interfere.

I heard Franc say, "Well, we'll give it a try anyway. If we find we can't get through there are a couple of good stories in Hunza. I'd like to do an article on the Mir. I hear he's a very colorful character, and quite democratic and friendly. A picture story, maybe. Think he'd mind?"

"Certainly not," said the voice on the phone. "You can take all the pictures you wish. We'll be glad to help."

"Sounds wonderful," Franc said. "But can you speak for the Mir?"

"Yes," was the reply. "You see, I am the Mir."

That evening a procession entered the bungalow. First came Khodiar carrying a very vocal sheep; then Barokha holding aloft a plate piled with nine pounds of butter; then two villagers bearing platters of potatoes, turnips, carrots, apricots, and apples; and finally the *arbab* of Misgar.

"A gift from His Highness, the Mir," announced the arbab, with a sweeping gesture.

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"How did it get here?" I asked.

"By telephone," explained Sholam, who had come along as interpreter.

"In our country," I said, "it is possible to telegraph flowers. But this is something new."

I think the schoolteacher misunderstood. That evening, while Franc was cooking a leg of lamb, flavored with Nabi's spices and wrapped in aluminum foil that we usually reserved to protect exposed film, a villager arrived with a bouquet of wild roses. From the Mir!

At ten the next morning, when we phoned the Mir to thank him for the banquet, he had exciting news for us. "I have just talked to the commander of the Pakistan garrison in Gilgit. He has heard from Kashgar that all is quiet there, although the Communists have crossed the eastern boundary of Sinkiang. It may be safe for you to cross the Mintaka, but I cannot advise you to go beyond Kashgar. It is true, by the way, that the American consul has fled Urumchi."

That afternoon I washed all our clothes and started to pack. Nothing was said about it, but I knew we would try the pass. We had come so far on Polo's trail that it was unthinkable that we should give up now.

Our travel north would be over the famous Hunza road, in more peaceful times the route of the Kashgari traders and pilgrims bound for Mecca. Most of the famous explorers of Central Asia—Stein, Sven Hedin, LeCoq, and Pelliot—had used that road. Now, however, political tension had all but eliminated travel over it. Though there was as yet no snow in the Hunza Valley, the nights were bitterly cold, and the snow line on the mountains crept lower each morning. Still, we were fairly certain we could cross the 15,500-foot pass into China before it was blocked by the snows.

We left on September 13, a party of five until we got beyond

Misgar's last stone fence. Then we discovered we were six. A silent Hunzukut with no pack, carrying only an old copper teapot, had joined our retinue.

We were two days' travel from the Chinese border post across the Mintaka Pass from Hunza. We quickly retraced the five miles to Kalam Darchi and passed the tents of the Pakistani soldiers, who shook their heads in foreboding. Where a branch of the Hunza River became the Mintaka, we headed north.

While we were resting at lunch, a lean Dakh runner, laden with mail and messages from Tashkurgan, in China, trotted down the trail toward us. For centuries Dakh runners have been the message-bearers of this Central Asian area. They can, and do, run from dawn until dark, possessing an amazing stamina. This one talked excitedly to our men, and tried to tell us something which we couldn't understand. The runner declined a cup of tea and ran on toward Misgar, apparently alarmed at finding us on the trail. Our Hunzukuts were reluctant to go on. While we urged them forward, we had a very definite premonition that all was not well.

Our shelter that night was a wide crack in the granite cliff. Our feet to a fire, we watched the stars and listened to the soft bleating noises of the sheep below and to the wind whining in the rocks. We talked briefly of our prospects. "One more hurdle," said Franc, thinking of the pass ahead, "and we're in China. But I wonder what that Dakh runner was so excited about?"

I kept silent. In spite of my fears, I could not bring myself to suggest going back.

The next morning we approached the pass on a gradually rising trail, which the deep snow made treacherous. The animals slowed their pace, cautiously seeking safe footing. The height of the Mintaka, a recorded 15,500 feet, didn't worry us. Compared to the Delhi Sang, it was not such a barrier. But what would we find beyond?

A few hundred feet from the crest, the trail rose sharply; and

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concentrating on climbing, we did not notice a Dakh runner overtaking us until we heard his sharp shouts to stop. Below us, he was waving a paper in his hand.

"Now what?" said Franc, leaning against a boulder while we waited for him to catch up.

The runner was exhausted. He had run from Misgar all through the night, through the snow. His message was from Nabi Khan, written on an old telegraph form.

"The border is closed," it said. "There is much trouble in Turkestan. The Mir insists that on no account do you cross the frontier and leave the protection of Hunza. Word has been received that the American consul and his party have left Kashgar and are on their way to India. Turn back immediately. The Mir will welcome you in Baltit."

"That does it," said Franc. "This is as far as we go." His voice was flat and final.

I sat down in the snow, too tired and deflated to express my disappointment. Neither of us reacted with much surprise. But this was the end of the Marco Polo trail. All our months of effort, our planning, our struggles, our good fortune, all the help from old friends and friends newly met, all in an instant vanished like a snowflake in the fire. No Shah or King or Kirghiz bandit could help us now. We had run up against the inexorable and ruthless force rolling across half of Asia. There was no argument now. We had to turn back.

As we threaded our way back down the valleys to Misgar, I realized that the emptiness I felt—the feeling of having nothing further to do—would have plagued me had we reached Hami and completed Polo's circuit. The exhilaration was in the try, not the accomplishment. And I could not help feeling some accomplishment. We had successfully followed the footsteps of Marco Polo across much of the ancient world. We had seen things that no American had ever seen before, crossed territories barred to foreigners for more than a century. Finally we had been turned aside not by physical difficulties, but by a political cataclysm.

Now we were to be privileged to see Hunza, which already fascinated us, and which Marco Polo had not seen.

When we reached Misgar, we found that the Mir had given orders that horses and guides were to be provided for the journey to Baltit.

The Hunza Road, stretching from Chinese Turkestan to Gilgit in northern Pakistan, for a thousand years has been known for its beauty—and its danger. It is the very terror of this road that has allowed Hunza to exist in serene isolation, safe from more powerful neighbors and untouched by modern civilization. No man could penetrate very far into the Hunza valley unless he were welcome.

For centuries it was the chief highway between Kashgar and Kashmir. Intrepid Chinese traders led pack trains laden with silks, tea, and porcelain into India along its frightening and incredible galleries. Returning to Cathay, they brought spices, jewels, gold, and ivory. A successful round trip could make a trader rich for life, but many lost their caravans—and life itself—in sudden landslides or the collapse of the galleries, called rafiks.

By the rafik, the Hunzukuts have created foot room where nature had no such intention. They have often been referred to as "triumphs of engineering," but I prefer to think of them as triumphs of faith. The principle of the rafik is very simple. The road builders are moving along a natural ledge on the face of the cliff, 2,000 feet above the valley. The ledge grows more and more narrow, and then disappears entirely, to reappear, as a rock fault often does, many feet ahead. How to bridge the gap? Usually there is a crack in the sheer cliff following the fault line. Into this crack the Hunzas drive a line of flat rocks. On these they lay other rocks, each successive layer protruding a bit farther over the abyss. More layers are added, interspersed with branches, until a ledge perhaps thirty inches wide, and sometimes only eighteen, projects from the cliff.

Occasionally where there was no crack, long poles were hung across the gaps to form a shaky bridge against the wall. These

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creaked and sagged as we crossed. The trail was not designed for two-way traffic, or for corpulent travelers. We passed only one trader, fortunately at the river level. Nor did we ever see a fat man in Hunza, which may account for their longevity.

One morning we reached the 500-year-old fort of Altit, perched casually on the edge of a precipice, and were at last within sight of the capital. Ahead we saw a castle, ancient and impressive, set high upon a mountain shoulder, while below in the valley sprawled the town of Baltit. Over this scene towered Rakapushi, the unclimbed 25,500-foot "Queen of the Snows."

The trail zigzagged downward until we reached the level of the old castle, its battlements crumbling and apparently uninhabited. We turned into a cobbled street, and found ourselves in front of a new castle, a modest palace of Western architecture built of hand-hewn Hunza granite, where the Mir himself waited to receive us.

The Mir, short by Hunza standards, and squarely built, was dressed in riding britches and a tweed coat. His dark hair and thick mustache shone in the sunlight, his complexion was ruddy, his dark eyes twinkled with good will and good health. He looked like a Scottish laird welcoming guests to his hearth and heather. The Mir at thirty-five, a mere youth by Hunza standards, had already ruled eight years.

"I hope the trail was not too arduous," he said. "You are welcome here, and we hope that you will remain for some time. We think you will like it." He had been educated at a British school in Gilgit, and his English was excellent.

The Mir escorted us to the palace guest house, overlooking the incomparable view of the Hunza Valley with its terraced fields rising steplike from the river. We had a living room with fireplace, a sunny dining room, a bedroom spread with Persian carpets and hung with Chinese scrolls, and a bathroom where hot water steamed in giant earthenware pitchers.

Several hours and two hot baths later, we strolled over to the palace for tea, and began to know a remarkable man, ruler of a remarkable state which by the accident of geography, and his wisdom, had remained an island of peace in a maelstrom of hatred, suspicion, and violence. Technically a part of Pakistan, bordering an aggressive China and an uneasy Afghanistan, only a few miles from the frontiers of Russia, Hunza managed to remain aloof from the fears and troubles of all.

"We are the happiest people in the world," the Mir said with a quiet sureness which precluded any boastfulness, "and I will tell you why. We have just enough of everything, but not enough to make anyone else want to take it away. You might call this the Happy Land of Just Enough."

Besides Burushaski and English, the Mir speaks fluent Persian, Urdu, Arabic, and the dialects of half a dozen neighboring princely states. He has a fine collection of guns and mounted heads, and was proud of his Yarkand carpets and sets of Russian chinaware which belonged to his ancestors. He had a radio, stacks of good books, and maintained a communications system of runners to bring the news up from Gilgit. He divided his day, the mornings for business, the afternoons for leisure and sports. His Highness Mohammed Jamal Khan was a happy man.

In Hunza, Franc and I learned the true joy of leisure. There was no place to go, and no way to get there, except on foot. There were no movies and no television. Only the Mir possessed a radio and his family rarely bothered to listen. Yet we were never bored. We discovered the pleasures of sitting quietly on a hillside and absorbing the beauty of our surroundings, the terraced green fields and the racing white river below, and the Queen of the Snows above.

But modern man's sojourn in paradise must be brief. One day the Mir brought us the Hunza guest book to sign. On its yellowing pages were the signatures of Sir Aurel Stein, Lord Curzon, C. P. Skrine, Sven Hedin, Theodore and Kermit Roosevelt. Proudly yet humbly, we wrote our names beneath these.

The next day we joined the Mir on his balcony, where he made a touching and friendly farewell speech, asking us to return and live for a year in the peace of his valley. He handed

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me two exquisite pearl bracelets. To Franc he gave a Hunza robe, a choga of ibex wool such as only the Mir himself is privileged to wear.

Franc threw the robe over his shoulders, and I slipped the bracelets on my wrists, and we walked on reluctant feet to our horses. We rode off down the trail toward Gilgit. Were we returning to civilization—or had we left it?

In Gilgit we met Liaquat Ali Khan, Pakistan's soon-to-bemartyred prime minister, and with him flew to Lahore and Karachi. Thence an airliner carried us, in nineteen hours, to London—retracing a journey which it had taken us eight months to accomplish overland. Still, we felt, we hadn't done so badly. Marco Polo's round trip took twenty-five years.

But the fruits of our journey were not to be measured in terms of time or speed. We had set out to follow an ancient trail, and in that we had been partially successful. Along that trail we had found hospitality and human kindness, warm hearts and open hands, generosity from kings and merchants and yak pullers, each giving what he had to give.

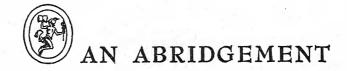
There is in Arabic an ancient proverb which says that "Travel is the gate of hell." This it may be for those who count only the wearying marches, the steep trails, the sore feet, and the freezing nights. But such inconveniences are soon forgotten.

I have never stopped traveling. I hope I never shall. Somewhere in the world there are other people like the Shah of Iran, like Rahman Qul, like Mirzah Hussan. Somewhere, perhaps, there is another Hunza. And I, like Marco Polo, shall be ever hunting them—hunting with a hungry heart.

# Heritage

## A NOVEL BY ANTHONY WEST

A story of a son torn between two high-powered, world-famous and unmarried parents



### The Authors

ANTHONY WEST was born on August 4, 1914, in England and has lived in this country since 1950. He started out to be a painter and has been successively a dairy farmer, news editor for the BBC, critic for The New Yorker and novelist. His previous books are The Vintage and Another Kind.

Mr. West and his wife live in an old farmhouse in Connecticut.

Castlereagh Gardens are to be found in South Kensington, the part of London between the Fulham Road and Kensington Gardens which was taken over from market gardeners and horse copers by the speculative builders in the decade following the Great Exhibition of 1852. The builders replaced the stiff rows of cabbages and Brussels sprouts and the neatly brushed ledges with stiff rows of cliff-faced stucco-fronted houses in a dead Palladian style. Round the corner there lay the friendly inconsequence of old Chelsea, but this was an area laid out to express the importance and respectability of its residents, people who knew how to live with dignity.

But the Gardens had gone a long way down hill by the time we went to live there in the early twenties, when I was five or six. Each year more houses surrounding the Square had been converted into apartments. When we moved in there were very few left in private hands.

We had the old drawing room floor, and the floor above. From our front windows we could look down into the gardens. The ground floor people had French windows opening onto iron staircases which led straight out into this enclosure. They had garden privileges as of right, but we had to apply to the Garden Committee for membership and pay two guineas to get a key to the gate in the speartipped cast iron railings which kept the vulgar out.

My mother's plan was that I should let myself in whenever I wanted and run wild there for as long as I liked. But she had not read the rules. It was not easy to run wild in Castlereagh Gardens. The rules not only prohibited the use of balls, bats, racquets, and kites but also said that "Children and dogs will be accompanied by an adult other than a servant when in the Gardens."

It was in the end more amusing to stand in the window of

the drawing room watching the proletarian dogs that squeezed their way through the railings being chased out than to go down there. When I did venture to slip into the holy enclosure by myself, no matter how discreetly I behaved, an elderly lady would emerge, in stiff-jointed indignation, either to expel me in person or to send the gardener over as her deputy.

After one of these encounters, I went indoors and asked my mother why we lived in such a horrid place. She looked at me with surprise and with a certain irritation: "But darling, it's one of the very nicest parts of London . . . everyone knows that. Most people would love to live here—so close to the parks and the museums."

The parks were a long way off, it seemed to me, and as I knew by experience that nothing would induce my mother to go for a walk in the park or to visit the museums this answer did not satisfy me—it merely added to my curiosity about my mother.

She was not in the least like a Kensington lady. She could not really believe that she belonged in these gray streets with these gray people who lived so quietly and with such restraint.

But then the problem, which occupied me more and more, was to know what kind of person my mother was. She was so many different people. I knew that she was an actress as well as my mother but that did not explain very much.

Our life together was to me full of mysteries. When I was at home I woke early, as most children do. I would have been happy to be up and doing, but mornings were always a time of movement on tiptoe, and whispering, until my mother's bell released the normal volume of human speech. Sometimes it rang before nine-thirty but not often. It usually broke into its jarring whirr between ten and eleven.

Once the bell had sounded its summons, MacEwan, the Scotch combination of general servant and nursemaid who looked after my mother and myself, went into action. Coffee simmering on the stove was poured into a thick china pot, croissants were whisked out of the oven and were put on a tray with one huge

cup, a single plate, and the five daily newspapers. As MacEwan swept out of the kitchen with the tray, I went along behind her, clutching the letters in a bundle, anxiously wondering what Mother's mood was going to be.

If it was bad she would be lying back, with her hair tousled round her like black sea-wrack, her face heavy and lightless. She would mutter a barely civil good morning to MacEwan and wave me away—"Not this morning, Dickie love, Mother's terribly tired."

But if the mood was good she would be sitting up smiling, radiant with a warm brown vitality, running a comb through her dark mass of red-black hair, and after joking with us both she would allow me to sit on the end of the bed, opening the letters for her with an onyx-bladed paper knife.

While she ate she rolled her eyes sideways and looked at the letters that I laid in front of her. "That's a horrid-looking bill, you can throw that one away. You needn't ever worry about a bill until they send a letter with it." "That looks like Kip Wiley, put that aside for me to read." "That's some silly little boy who wants a photograph, put it aside on the theatre pile—the people down at the theatre will send him what he wants." "That's a love letter, I'll read that now." If there were enough nice letters and love letters to balance the horrid bills, I would be allowed to stay and read the papers with Mother.

She read them at lightning speed from page one to the back page. Sometimes she would draw my attention to particular stories in the news and explain them to me in her own rather special way.

"Did you see that piece about Huey Long? About somebody hitting him in a nightclub. I met him when I was in Washington after the thing I was in in New York folded. He's a horrible sort of genius. . . ." and then she'd imitate Huey Long.

She had been everywhere and seen everything, or so it appeared. She pulled out all the contents of her photographic memory as if she were sharing a box of toys with me.

The best times of all were when there was a new murder in

the papers, crime reporting in the twenties and early thirties being the strong point of English journalism. She would read the accounts of the investigations and trials in her deep "serious" voice, scamping none of the details.

She transformed her big baroque bed into a little Guignol theatre, and ravished me with pleasures that were not the least less delightful for being thoroughly unhealthy by modern educational standards. But these performances always ended abruptly and unpredictably.

"Well, that's quite enough of that—run along, lamb. I've got a part to study." And then she would spend the rest of the day wrapped in a remoteness that was in its way as frightening as were her moods of anger and discontent. In a pink quilted dressing gown, stained down the front with coffee, she would pace up and down the apartment muttering her lines. For the most part, she was utterly indifferent to my presence, but occasionally she would become aware of me and her glazed eyes would suddenly gleam with recognition.

"Oh go away—why aren't you out in the park or playing somewhere—why can't you behave like an ordinary child? Why are you always loafing around indoors pestering me . . ."

MacEwan would come on the run and clap me into an overcoat and hat and we would scuttle out breathless until an hour or two had gone by and the emotional storm was over.

By then the mood would have changed and the exasperation would have a new focus: "Wherever have you been, MacEwan—I've been waiting for you for hours—I can't have you giving up all your time to that child. It's hopeless for me to even try to work in the circumstances. My work's going to pieces—I'm at my wits' end. The child must go to Willingham's."

Once this had been said there would be an interlude in which Mr. Willingham was written to and the arrangements were made; a time of heavy tension which MacEwan would ease as best she could by arranging little treats for me—lunches of foods I specially liked, buttered toast at tea, and gifts of boxes of toy soldiers.

MacEwan had another human name, Maggie or Margaret, but nobody had ever heard her called by it. I was allowed to call her Mackie when she was in good humor, but my mother always called her MacEwan as if she were a man talking to a manservant, and so did everyone who held any sort of intimate or friendly relation with my mother. Naomi Savage's butler in skirts was a joke and legend among the theatre people who came and went in the apartment. Larry Brook, who wrote smart comedies and who at one time was supposed to be a contemporary Congreve, used to invent MacEwan anecdotes: "Naomi's dragon said the divinest thing yesterday. . . ." I heard these stories told at my mother's cocktail parties, at which I was allowed to be present if I kept silent, and they made me wonder because I had never heard MacEwan say anything in the least funny. They made me a little ashamed too, because I knew that often enough, when there was no money in the house or in the bank, MacEwan went to her big black handbag with pursed lips to take out cash or her Post Office savings book. We seemed to be either very rich or very poor, but MacEwan always had something, and it was often very badly needed. I never quite understood how Mother had the courage to laugh with Larry Brook and follow up his nonsense with inventions of her own that ended with a peal of laughter. ". . . yes, MacEwan's really too absurd, I don't know why I put up with her. . . . "

The woman who said this, fashionably dressed, impeccably made up, and with beautifully arranged hair, had no movement, no gesture, and no intonation that I ever saw when I was alone with her. She was another person called into being by the entry into the apartment of such people as Larry. She was often nice to me with the sort of niceness that this personality was capable of, after she had decided to send me to Willingham's. When she heard that there was, and there always was, a vacancy there, and that I would be expected by the next convenient train, she would lull her conscience by taking me to lunch at the Ivy, the smart theatrical restaurant, before packing me off into exile.

The Willinghams were two old troupers who had retired from

the profession when Mrs. Willingham's father died and left them his farm near Sandwich.

They were nice people and they did one very well. The orchard trees were fun to climb; the barn was full of swinging ropes, rope ladders, and hay to jump on and hide in. Mrs. Willingham welcomed us with genuine delight. It was always she who met us at Minster Halt and every time it was as if something specially nice had happened for everybody concerned. But hard as she tried to make the place a home and to fill it with love, she fought a losing battle and we were all as glad to go as we were sad to come.

Mackie knew how I felt about the Willinghams' and it was by way of compensation for my being sent there that one surprising day she showed me what my mother did and what an actress was. Mother was out to lunch before playing a matinee and Mackie and I ate in the kitchen. The scenes during the preceding week had been unusually violent and it was plain to me that the only reason I was being sent away was that I was a nuisance about the place. MacEwan suddenly looked at the clock, looked at me, and came to a decision.

"You'll never understand what all this is about until you see what the woman's up to," she said. "I'll likely lose my place for it but it's better that you should know why you're put upon the way you are than that you should worry your wee heart out. We'll be off to the Palinode Theatre."

The Palinode was a small enough theatre, built in the eighteenfifties in the style known to decorators as Louis Quatorze, but
as we came into its white lobby, which seemed to have been
made of whipped cream, I was enormously impressed. The
scarlet carpet, the heavy doors swinging incessantly as the crowd
pressed in to take their seats, the palm trees in brass tubs, the
gold-framed mirrors, and the enormous chandeliers all seemed
incredibly splendid to me. MacEwan had anchored me by a
potted palm and threatened me with instant departure for Kent
if I moved before she got back with the tickets but I was quite
pleased to stay staring around me.

Tubby Anderson, the theatre manager, had come into the lobby from his office, following his usual habit of taking a look at the audience before the show. I knew him at once, I had often seen him at Mother's cocktail parties.

"Hello, youngster, come to see Mummy act?"

"Yes, please, Mr. Anderson, MacEwan's buying the tickets now."

"What the devil's she doing that for? She can have any seat she wants any time. . . . She's only got to ask. . . ." He looked over towards the box office and met MacEwan's eyes as she made her way back towards us.

"What's all this about . . . why are you buying tickets to Naomi's show? . . ."

MacEwan gestured towards me. "Little pitchers . . ." she said mysteriously. "The boy's being packed off to the country again and I'm letting him see his mother act before he goes."

A curious expression crossed Anderson's face. "You mean she doesn't . . ."

"No," said MacEwan, "and she'd better not . . . "

"Poor little blighter," said Anderson. "I'd give you a box if you'd like it—but perhaps you're safer in the dress circle."

"I think we're best out of sight," said MacEwan. "Out of sight, out of mind, and no harm done."

"You know best, I suppose," said Tubby, and stared down into my face with a wondering look. "Have you never seen your mother act before?"

"Oh no, sir. It's terribly exciting."

"Well, I'll be damned," said Tubby. "I'll never make that woman out, never, until my dying day," he said half to himself. "Here, boy." He pulled a handful of change out of his pocket and fished out four half-crowns. "Here's a sort of tip. This is going to be a day to remember."

MacEwan had bought seats off to the side of the front row of the dress circle and as we took our places there I stopped thinking altogether. I was simply a pair of eyes and ears absorbing the theatre. I listened to the bustle and stir of an un-

settled audience for the first time with a strange knotting in the pit of my stomach. I felt the change that instantly came over the crowd as the lights began to dim. The knot in my stomach tightened and then abruptly vanished as the front curtains swung apart and the drop curtain behind them, flooded with the magic glow of the footlights, slowly floated up out of sight. Two Roman soldiers stood at the foot of a flight of stairs, their helmets held in the crooks of their arms. I gasped at the sight of them and gasped again when I heard a man's voice richly giving out the masculine equivalent of what I had always thought of as my mother's pretend voice.

"Nay but this dotage of our General's o'erflows the measure; those his goodly eyes that o'er the files and musters of the war . . ."

I grabbed at MacEwan's hand beside me in the dark and clutched it for dear life as I heard her mutter, "It's in the blood, you poor wee beastie, and what else?"

She pressed my hand a few seconds later and whispered, "Now here comes your mother, hold on tight. . . ."

She came on stage in the hieratic headdress of an Egyptian Queen, robed in dark green and blue clouded over with a mist of stars, with Antony all gold and scarlet beside her. Then I heard the voice, richer and softer than I had ever heard it before, familiar and yet wholly unfamiliar, welling out and rolling through the huge cave of blackness around them.

"If it be love indeed, tell me how much . . ."

It was an astonishing and unforgettable revelation and from the moment of that most gloriously contrived entrance—one of the greatest gifts of the race of playwrights to the race of actresses—until the death scene in the monument, I was fascinated and intoxicated.

MacEwan tore me away while Mother and the cast took their curtain calls. Looking back of my shoulder as we hurried up the aisle towards an exit, I saw that Mother and her colleagues were already softening out of their roles. They were no longer Kings and Queens, but polite people responding to the compliments of people like themselves.

I remember that I cried in the taxi going to Victoria. I could not explain my feelings and so I took refuge in tears. MacEwan was in a spoiling mood, unusual with her. Before she put me on the train and put me in charge of the guard, she bought me an armful of magazines. It was not at all an unpleasant journey.

The intoxication that had come upon me in the theatre returned to make it go by like a flash and my inner eye presented to me again and again the vision of my mother as a Queen.

It was clear to me now that the life I shared with my mother was an irrelevant phase of her existence, and that I had that afternoon glimpsed its vital part for the first time. Beyond the orchestra pit in that rich blaze of light, she existed fully and completely. I could see too, clearly enough, that I did not belong out there, I was no kin to the Queen of Egypt.

I looked up startled into the brick-red face of the guard who smiled down at me. . . . "We're in Minster, Laddiebuck, it's the end of the line for you. Gather up your magazines and I'll hand down your bag."

I stepped out into the cold night air. As I stood shivering a little with my bundle of still unread magazines under my arm, Mrs. Willingham sailed down the platform spreading her arms out wide in the usual way. "Why there the darling child is—I thought it would never arrive—but bless it here it is—and I'm so glad to see it."

Mr. Willingham had come down to meet the train with his wife and they had waited for me in the Bar Parlor of the Railway Arms opposite the station so they were in a mood to respond to my enthusiasm about Antony and Cleopatra. Mr. Willingham had played Enobarbus once, and to my delight filled the car with a plumpy, vocally upholstered reading of the barge speech as soon as I named the play. After hearing the speech for a second time I could parrot a good part of it, and in my excitement burst out with it after him.

"God bless my soul," cried Mr. Willingham. "The divine fire is there, the ichor is in the blood, the boy is doomed, doomed. . . ."

"Doomed, Mr. Willingham?" I faltered. "Have I done anything wrong?"

"Why, you little juggins, I only meant you had it in you to become an actor. I think he will, Flossie, my dear. I'm sure he will." He patted me with warm friendliness.

"He might just as well be a famous writer like his father," said Mrs. Willingham. "Why, lamb, you'll be whatever you want to be if you want hard enough. You're such a bright little thing, really you are."

"My father?" I said, seizing on it, "who is my father? Is he alive? Is he a very famous writer?"

"Why, of course. Don't you know? You silly little thing?" asked Mrs. Willingham. "He . . ."

"Now you've put your foot in it, Flossie," said Mr. Willingham.

He put his arm around me and patted me like a dog. "Flossie's an old rattle," he said. "She doesn't mean half what she says. You mustn't pay any attention to her. She doesn't know anything about your father, I don't believe, no more than you do. Tell me more about that play."

I wasn't at the farm very long that time, less than a month, but the days seemed to drag interminably. I longed to be back home so that I could catch my mother in such a radiantly good mood that it would be possible to ask her the question the Willinghams couldn't or wouldn't answer.

But when I did go home to London and the apartment, Mother was gone, she was playing Cleopatra in New York with the rest of the company and after that she was to go on to Hollywood to make a movie. It would be an eternity before she returned. I slipped into her room the first morning after my return and stood there for a long time staring about me.

There were a number of photographs grouped closely together in a colorful mosaic of picture frames. I looked at them with a new curiosity, playwrights, actors, a bemedaled soldier in uniform, a man seated at a piano, wondering if perhaps one of them was my father. But there was no way of knowing.

MacEwan came by the open door.

"Mackie," I said, "I'm sure you know, please tell me about my father . . . please, please."

She flushed, standing solidly with the dustpan and brush in her hands, a figure beyond anything practical and unsentimental.

"That would be telling," she said, "and I've promised that I won't. Now come on out of your mother's room, and be off to your toys or books."

I jumped down from the chair and ran at her in a black rage, longing consciously for the first time in my life to hurt someone beyond their endurance.

"I hate you, Mackie, I hate you. I hate you more than anything," I screamed and pummeled her with my fists. "I hate you. I hate Mother. I hate everybody."

She took me by the shoulders and shook me till my teeth rattled. "I don't wonder at it," she said. "But you've no call to take it out on me. You'll find out all you want to know when your mother wants you to find out, and that's all I can tell you for now."

Mackie went to the kitchen and wrote a letter, as I afterwards learned, to my mother, saying that she could no longer take the responsibility of looking after me unless the questions I was asking were answered. I don't know how she put things but it was apparently the wrong way because her letter produced an immediate result. Mother's lawyer, Johnny Wallis, came to see us within a week. He had received a cable from America. "Give MacEwan two months' wages and dismiss. Put Richard in good boys' boarding school. America more wonderful than ever. All love. Naomi."

Before I fully realized what was happening Mackie was gone. I had spent an odd ten days as a bewildered guest at the Wallis house and presently, with an outfit of strange new clothes, I was at St. Michael's school for boys.

There is a good deal to be said about such places as St. Michael's and their effect on the English character but it would be beside the point. All that I can say is that I have never encountered anything quite so unpleasant in life since. What is to the point is that I very soon made a friend of a short round-faced fair boy called Dulley. He approached me one day as I stood aimless and unhappy at the side of the asphalt playground during the noon break.

"I say, new bug, what's your name?"

"Savage. What's yours?"

"Dulley. But I've been here a term, you're not allowed to ask me questions. It's some silly custom or something. My father's a journalist, what's yours?"

"I don't know."

"What do you mean, you don't know? Is he dead or are your people divorced?"

"I don't know."

"I say, you aren't illegit, are you? That would be terrific. Didn't you ever ask your mother?"

"No, I don't know why not, but she gets in a bate if you ask her questions she doesn't want to answer."

"I say, that sounds jolly promising. You're probably a missing heir or something, like in books. Is your mother anything special, like a Duchess or anything?"

"I think so. She's an actress. I saw her once. It was marvelous."

Dulley looked alarmed. "You mustn't say marvelous here. Things are wizard or terrific. . . . Savage? Holy Joe, she isn't Naomi Savage, is she? She is, why that's wizardly-terrific."

He looked at me and brushed a lock of yellow hair off his forehead. "All rotting apart, I mean really, it must be fun to have a mother like that. I wish I did. I bet you are illegit, though,

actresses do that sort of thing more than anybody. It'll be a terrific thrill finding out who your father is. I bet my father knows."

Every Saturday and Sunday was a visiting day at St. Michael's. Parents could come down and take their children out to lunch and tea if they wanted to and they were allowed to take out one guest of their offspring's choice. Dulley wrote home immediately after this conversation and told his father that Naomi Savage's son would be his guest on the following Saturday.

He showed me the letter before he mailed it; "You don't mind if I say that, do you? I could have just said you were jolly nice or something and not said anything about your mother, but I thought that would be a sort of thrill for the old man."

St. Michael's stood at the end of a brief avenue of gangling lime trees thirty or forty years old. On visiting days schoolboy ritual demanded that one go and sit on the top bar of an iron fence which ran along under this line of trees, to wait for one's parents. That will not sound at all unpleasant to anyone ignorant of the ways of British schools, but the occasion was none the less a social ordeal, productive of a dozen kinds of torment. The cars in which the parents arrived were closely scrutinized. Woe to the boy his mother kissed or greeted with a nickname. Woe, too, to the child whose parents showed the slightest sign of being a freak or nonconformist.

Dulley's father was on to all this, and careful not to expose his son. He gave a beautifully controlled performance as he brought his open sports car to a stop at our feet. "Hallo, Dulley," he said and smiled at me as he shook hands across the low side door. "I don't have to be introduced to you, Town," he said.

"He's Savage," said Dulley. His father flushed. "I'm sorry, Savage, it just slipped out.

"You're so like your father it's funny. You've got Max's eyes and eyebrows—it's amazing. I'd have known you in a crowd. Well, jump in and let's get out of here."

We ran round to the far side of the machine and squashed into the bucket seat beside him. Dulley, sitting stiff with excitement beside me, nudged me as the car began to gather speed.

"I say, that's pretty wizard about it being Town, isn't it? I knew it must be someone terrific. You are a lucky beast, I'd love to have exciting parents like that."

I grinned and opened my mouth to answer, but got a mouthful of wind that choked me as the car accelerated.

I should know more about that second day of discovery than I do, but when I look back I remember only that we had cold salmon, which was new to me, for lunch, and that we had a picnic tea in a hired electric canoe on the Thames.

I don't suppose that I will ever forget leaning over the throbbing side of the canoe watching the gaily painted oar blades biting into the water. It was much easier to think about that sort of thing than about the strange and unexpected discovery that my father was Max Town. He was divided from me by something harder to cross than a mere row of footlights, a barrier of print and a reputation. I had seen his photograph beside feature articles on the League of Nations and similar subjects of political aspect in the daily papers, a darkly foreboding, serious, public face, and I had seen his name on the backs of books. Such a person seemed remote and dead, as far off as Dickens and Thackeray, quite out of the world I inhabited. I trailed a finger in the brown water of the Thames and wondered what he was like when he stepped out of the pages of his books or came out from behind the newspapers.

It only takes a pebble to start an avalanche, and Dulley's father started one with a few idle words a couple of days later. He went to his club for lunch and, as he went upstairs to the dining room, found himself walking beside my father. "Hallo, Max," he said, "this is quite a coincidence. I was having lunch with your son the other day." "Oh, were you? Which one? Freddy or John?" "Neither—the young one, Dickie Savage—he's at the same school as my boy. It's amazing how like you he is; I'd have known him anywhere."

My father said something noncommittal and they went on upstairs to eat. He thought about Mr. Dulley's remarks during

his meal, and they stayed in his mind later while he was getting the worst of a political argument with two young Tories in the coffee room. When they left him he found a vent for his irritation: he went over to a desk and dashed off a letter to my mother on the club writing paper.

It was to the effect that I'd been so badly brought up, and that she'd handled things so stupidly that I'd been boasting about my distinguished parentage at St. Michael's and making capital out of my irregular origin. A journalist had got hold of the story and had been pestering him with sly innuendoes and threats of adverse publicity. This had got to stop. He was exhausted by his recent trip to Russia, and desperately trying to finish a new book. It was intolerable that he should be bothered at such a time. Unless Mother could control her own and my insatiable appetites for notoriety he would have to take legal action to protect himself. He knew that there were very good boys' schools indeed in Switzerland. If my mother would agree to send me there he would make himself responsible for the school fees. As her child I was liable in any case to be highly strung and unstable. It was in my best interest that I should be put in a school where I would neither be exposed, nor tempted to expose myself, to the activities of mercenary and unscrupulous journalists.

He slipped the letter into an envelope and mailed it. The storm of nervous irritation was over and his spirit purged.

He didn't think of it again for a couple of weeks. On his way back from Russia he had visited East Prussia and had there encountered Lolotte, the Grafin von Essling-Sterlinghoven, who had followed him to England. She was the daughter of a former German military attaché to the embassy at Constantinople and a very beautiful Phanariot Greek woman he had married. She had inherited an imperious strength from her father, beauty and warmth from her mother, and she brought vivid confusion into Max's life that he very much enjoyed when he felt like playing, and detested when he felt like working.

For the first few days of her visit to England he had been in

the mood to play. She had brought an enormous white and silver road-racing Mercedes with her, and it amused him to make exotic descents with her on the little semi-suburban market towns and small places where he had lived in his years of poverty.

Chance brought them into the neighborhood of Maidenhead one Saturday, and I floated to the top of his mind by some random quirk of association. "D'you know I've got a boy in school somewhere near here, what do you say we look him up and take him out to lunch?"

I didn't expect any visitor that day, and Dulley didn't expect his father, so we weren't in position on the fence. I was in Drake House common room when one of the House Monitors came in. "I say, Savage, two of the most amazing freaks are out in front asking for you. Brace up and turn out."

Freaks? Had Tubby Anderson, or some of Mother's theatre people taken it into their heads to come down to take me out? As I hurried through the cloakroom, grabbing up my cap and coat, I prayed that it wasn't Tubby. I flew out of the swing doors and stopped dead on the top step. The Grafin's car was fine, in fact its nickel-plated exhaust pipes, semicircular wired racing windshields, and outside brake and gearshift, all had enormous prestige value. But even though the car was beyond question, my father and the Grafin had arrived in it, and they would have discounted even the winning car in the Le Mans race.

My father was walking up and down the driveway talking to the Headmaster about progressive education. He had brought back from Moscow a black caracul hat, and a long coat reaching almost to the ground with a hint of the Cossack about its waist-line and its flared skirt. The Grafin, who was walking on the other side of the Headmaster listening, was wearing a leopard-skin coat. Her head was cropped almost as short as a boy's, in the extremity of a new fashion, and two heavy gold clips glinted on the lobes of her ears. She saw me first and pointed to me with an arm loaded with Arab bracelets: "Ach, Max, that one's yours all right. He's adorable! But adorable!" I looked away

from her in confusion, and met my father's eye. He smiled, half in embarrassment, half in amused delight at my dumbfounded expression.

As I came down the steps and crossed the gravel with dragging feet, thoroughly conscious of the row of craning figures under the lime trees, I felt like a man going to the scaffold. I thought, though I was far from sure, that I could trust my father—even though he was wearing that frightful hat—but I knew the Grafin was going to do something appalling. I could feel it in my bones.

I was right about my father, he shook hands with me formally enough and conveyed his emotions with a quick squeeze of my shoulder, but the Grafin dropped onto her knees, hugged me to her, and planted a dozen kisses on my cheeks.

"Oh, the wunderkind," she cried in German, "he's fantastically like you, Max. This is definite—I must have a little Essling-Sterlinghoven just like this to take home with me to Germany."

I couldn't understand what she said, but as I wriggled out of her arms I caught sight of the Headmaster's face, flushing scarlet, and I gathered that what she was saying was even worse than it sounded to an ear unused to German.

It was an exciting day. We went to Oxford for lunch, touching ninety-five miles an hour twice on the way. The Grafin attracted a good deal of attention in the dining room of the Randolph Hotel. She rattled on about everything under the sun, and when she wasn't talking my father was, expansively, charmingly and amusingly, steering Lolotte away from sex and onto subjects that seemed to him more likely to be interesting to me.

He brought up ancient Britons, and then having made me interested in them decided that we should spend the afternoon looking for the old British road called the Ridgeway. We found the faint grass track late in the afternoon, and walked for an hour in the soft evening light on the close-cropped springy turf while my father talked about the beginnings of history in England, about farming, about the civil wars between King and Parliament, and about the early days of flying.

I murmured from time to time that we ought to be getting

back, that I was due in at school at six o'clock. "Oh, I'll fix that up—I'll see you don't get into any trouble," he said, waving a friendly arm at the grassy downs. "This is too good to miss for some silly rule or other. Don't you worry."

We had dinner in Henley, and after it, while the Grafin and my father drank coffee and brandy, I tasted hard liquor for the first time in the form of crème de cacao with a float of thick cream on top. When we came out the early night sky was a luminous green. I felt very drowsy and well fed, and as soon as I was wrapped up under a rug in the car I dropped off to sleep. My father and the Grafin forgot all about me, and it was not until they began to get into the outskirts of London that something reminded them they had to return me to my school.

It was a little after midnight when we reached St. Michael's, and there was quite a scene with the Headmaster and his wife who were waiting up for us. I was barely awake and I knew very little about it. I only remember my father carrying me into the house, and saying good night to me. "You're a ripping kid, Dick, and we're going to have a lot of good times together from now on." He bent his head down and nuzzled his rough cheek against mine. "Good night, old man, we had a good day, didn't we?"

The Headmaster's wife, stiff with indignation, took me from him and bore me away upstairs. She settled me into bed as if I were a baby in the darkened dormitory, and she, too, kissed me good night. "Poor little mite," she said tenderly, as if something dreadful had happened to me. "Such people! . . ."

The boy in the next bed, needless to say, was not asleep, and watched this tender passage with amazement and delight. In the morning I found that I had a new school name, "Poor Little Mite," that stayed with me until I left St. Michael's.

But at the time that was the least of my worries. I had a letter from my mother in the middle of that week. I opened it and read it with bewilderment:

"Dear Dickie—I don't know what you've done, you poor little fool, but it's infuriated your father. I suppose I should have told you a long time ago who your father is and what

a strange unhappy creature he is, but I couldn't bear to speak about it, and I hoped I wouldn't have to tell you about him until you were old enough to understand these things. He has some idea that you've been telling people at school that you're his son. Some journalist or other who has a boy there has got hold of the story and has been plaguing his life out. I wouldn't bother you with this, but Tubby writes and tells me that some dreadful German woman has got hold of him and is making him behave in the most odd and demented way just now and I can't tell you how awful it can be for us both if he gets into one of his furies. I've tried the best I can to keep you out of his way because he is so strange and unreliable at times, and I do hope you'll be careful not to talk about him. Who your father is is our private business and you don't have to talk about it. I will be back in England at the end of July and we might go to the South of France for the summer holidays. Perhaps you should have swimming lessons before you go, would you ask them to give them to you at the school? All my love, Naomi."

I couldn't make head or tail of it. I read the letter with one hand over a black eye. I had had one tooth knocked out too, in the seventh fight in three days with people who had called my father and the Grafin horrible names. What did Mother mean by saying Father was angry with me for talking about him? Who had made trouble for whom, anyway? The letter just didn't make sense.

Though I didn't know it then, another letter was in the mail at the time, a request from the Headmaster to Johnny Wallis, who had got me into St. Michael's, asking him to make arrangements for the following term. The letter gave a rather guarded account of my father's visit, but restrained as it was it upset Johnny. He felt that it was necessary, to avoid any more trouble of the same kind, to write to my father begging him not to go near the school again on any account for my sake. And as my mother's lawyer he wrote to her explaining what had happened, and telling her that he would do all he could to find a suitable school for me to go to in the autumn.

"Candidly, I don't think any school will be able to deal with

this kind of thing, and though we ought to do everything we can to stay out of the Courts it may be necessary to get the boy more protection than we can give him unaided. I'm reluctant to advise having him made a ward of the court, but if there's any repetition on his father's part of this irresponsible behavior we should probably take that course. . . ."

He was in an even frame of mind when he wrote the letter, and he had a very clear picture of what he meant. Two quiet-voiced lawyers would go to transact ten or fifteen minutes' business, probably less, with a quiet-voiced judge in chambers.

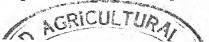
But my mother was not in an even frame of mind when she received Johnny's note. She was on location, shooting Global Pictures' version of *The Miracle*, and with the temperature in the upper eighties she had spent the day riding a horse out, and out, and once more please, out of the gates of a plaster castle. When she retired to her trailer to rest she found the letter from England waiting for her.

She read it with horror—to her, legal action meant only one thing. She immediately saw herself entering the witness box, as a stir of anticipation swept the courtroom. She could see it all as clearly as if it had already happened. A hostile King's Counsel would make disgraceful use of her private life. Those dreadful creatures in the press box would lap it all up. When she left the court to go home she would be faced by batteries of cameras and a staring crowd. Everyone in London would be licking their lips over the headlines, and the salacious, warped stories beneath them. STARTLING NEW EVIDENCE IN TOWN CASE. ACTRESS WEEPS IN WITNESS BOX.

She picked up a pen, and the day's exasperations, subtly transformed and refined, began to run onto the paper: "My dear Max. I have no objection to your running around London impersonating Puss in Boots if you must. What you do to your reputation and your dignity is no concern of mine, but I do feel that you should think seriously about what you are doing when you drag our poor little boy off on your escapades. I suppose you will pretend that it surprises you when I tell you that he's

already been expelled from the very decent private school I'd chosen for him because of the exhibition you chose to stage there. I can't tell you what pain and heartbreak it is to me to find that all the years of sacrifice and labor that I've given up to making him a happy normal child are to be thrown away because you take it into your head to make him a plaything for some petite amie you can't think how to amuse. I can't bear to think of what may happen to Richard if you are going to come and go in his life as cruelly as you came and went in mine. You have such a deadly power to make people believe that you mean what you say, and he's such a defenseless little boy. It will be so easy for you to make him believe that you love him and care for him, and it will be so dreadful for him to find out that you care as little for him as you've cared for the rest of us who've given you our love and devotion. Please, please, promise that if I give in to you and send Richard away to this school in Switzerland you won't pursue him there, to destroy the even pattern of his life all over again. . . ."

Her pen ran on, she covered sheet after sheet of paper in her rounded childish handwriting, and in the end she achieved something memorable. It reached my father at a sufficiently unfortunate moment. For weeks he had had an idea for a new novel taking shape in his head and the time had come when he had wanted to settle down to work on it. But the Grafin Essling-Sterlinghoven had been in his house and neither concentration nor work had been possible. At last he had remonstrated with her, she was being unreasonable, absurd, she must realize that she was interfering with his work. She walked out of the house -and did not return. But her going brought him no peace, and he found it more difficult to get to work than ever. He had no idea where she was, and he found her absence harder to bear than her presence. Every morning instead of going to his desk he roamed round the empty house, missing her. He heard the letters fall through the slit in the front door into the mail box and went downstairs to fetch them. There was nothing from Lolotte. He looked at the envelope with the American stamps on it absently,



that couldn't be from her. Wait a minute, though, that's a familiar handwriting. . . . He tore it open and read my mother's letter.

As his eye traveled over the page all his exasperation, perplexity, and unhappiness, found a new focus. Try and keep his son from him, would she? Try to smuggle the boy off to Switzerland out of his way? Something stirred in his memory. Now that he came to think of it, there had been another letter from some shyster lawyer or other along the same lines. He went into his study and rummaged among the letters until Wallis's complaint turned up.

There it was, a coldly formal piece of impertinence. He would not stand for it. If Naomi was going to try to harass him with lawyers he would show her that two could play that game.

The vision of old Meopham, the senior partner in Meopham, Lazard, and Lazard, flashed before his eye. He was the man for this job, he could be relied on to give yours sincerely J. M. Wallis some surprises.

Max took up the irritating letter and wrote a line under the signature: "What do you think of this? I know it's late in the day, but isn't there some way we can get a court to establish my right to see the child whenever I want? I'd like to have a voice in planning his education, too. You have a free hand to do your best. Yours as ever, Max."

The battle had begun. It dragged on for years. I understood some of its phases at the time, and others only much later.

I enjoyed its beginning. Johnny Wallis came and took me to tea one day at Mr. Justice Bell's chambers in the Temple. I sat on the edge of a Hepplewhite chair and ate a currant bun.

"I hope that's a good bun," said the Judge. "I'm not sure that I'd rely on my manservant to be an expert when it came to sweet buns—does it have enough currants in it?"

"Oh yes, sir," I said.

"Now where do you suppose those currants come from?"

"A grocer's shop, I suppose, sir," I said.

"I believe they came from Greece," he said. "Did you never hear that?"

I said I had not.

"I used to be very interested in Greece," he said, "in people like Demosthenes, and Socrates, and Alcibiades, and so on. Do they interest you?"

I admitted that I had never heard of them; I disclosed a minute or two later that I did not know anything about the Aeneid. I had not heard of Molière either, or La Fontaine. Johnny Wallis began to look tense. Shakespeare wafted into the conversation, and suddenly while Wallis smiled and the Judge looked amused I was quoting Enobarbus' speech. But after that it appeared that I did not know what the Pharos of Alexandria was.

"Well, no matter," said the Judge; "why should you trouble your head over such matters, after all." He smiled charmingly. "I daresay you'd like to see rather more of your father than you have done lately."

"Oh, yes sir," I said.

I was enjoying myself very much; I did not realize that I had been given an examination and had failed it, or that Meopham and my father had won a round from Wallis and my mother. Nor would I have been at all depressed if I had known it, because the immediate effect of the tea party was that the court laid down, among other things relating to my schooling, that my father must have reasonable access to me, and defined reasonable access in terms that allowed for my going to stay with him for visits of some duration. My father spent a great deal of his time in those days at his apartment in Paris, so that my world underwent an exciting enlargement in consequence of this arrangement.

I had often seen the boat trains for Folkstone and Dover flashing through Ashford Junction without slackening speed, when I was on my way down to Minster, and had peered at the

faces of the people in the Pullmans, wondering what it would be like to go abroad. Now it was my turn, and I learned what it was like to stand in the bow of a boat waiting to catch a first glimpse of a new country.

At the Gare Maritime after the excitement of going ashore in a babble of French, there was the almost greater excitement of the Paris *rapide*. I was at the entry to another world, one in which anything might happen, and in which everything was different. Max would meet me under the huge glass tent of the Gare du Nord in Paris, and would sweep me off to the apartment overlooking the Parc Monceau through streets filled with a blaze of unfamiliar color, high-pitched sound, and rapid movement.

Every day there was something new and exciting to do, and everything we did was made to seem amusing. For a week or ten days Max would give up all his time and energy to playing with me, treating the city as if it was a fair which had been set up for our amusement. And then, all too suddenly, the days had flown away, and I would find myself on the boat train again, rushing away from Dover through the Kent countryside, so snug, so cozy, and so small in scale.

As it grew dark the London suburbs would close in on the railroad track, and then with a sullen hissing the train would come to a stop in Victoria Station. The adventure was over. A solidly driven London taxi, so unlike a volatile, darting, and impetuous French cab, would drive me through increasingly familiar streets, and at last I would find myself staring up at the gaunt stucco façade of the Kensington house.

When I entered the corridor hall it would seem narrower than ever, my room, the little dining room, and the tiny kitchen, more boxlike, and the drawing room, for all its size, more crowded and jumbled.

My mother did not notice my growing discontent with our old way of life for some time. Since she had not wanted me to set up a relationship with my father she averted her mind from the whole subject, never asking me anything about my visits to him. Occasionally, if I used a French word, partly out of naïve snobbery, and partly to provoke her into recognizing that I had been abroad, she would snap.

"You're really getting absurdly affected, you'll end up by making yourself quite ridiculous if you talk like that—like those idiotic Roumanians who pretend that they've forgotten their own language." I would feel crushed and hurt, and Mother would exploit the situation remorselessly.

"Besides, you know, you've picked up a vulgar accent—I suppose you've been talking to some servant or other—and you give yourself away, it's the way you roll your R's. If you want to speak good French I can get you a tutor and you can really work at it. . . ."

That was not what I wanted at all, and I sulked about the apartment, hatefully bored, spending long hours listening to Radio Paris, or playing French records on the victrola.

Enlightenment came to my mother suddenly, as soon as she turned her quick mind to the subject which she had for so long evaded. On her way out to lunch she passed the drawing room door, and saw me sprawled on the sofa reading a French novel.

"Why aren't you out? Why are you always indoors? How can you bear to be inside on a lovely day like this?"

She came in and stood over me in a spasm of irritation.

"Why don't you ever do anything like other children?" She twitched the book out of my hands. "Reading Cocteau at your age—I really don't know what your father thinks he's doing to you. . . ."

"I'm fourteen, what's so wrong about reading a book if I want to—and besides there isn't anything to do in London."

She didn't reply at once, but stared at me for a few seconds with her nostrils a little dilated. She had suddenly seen in an interior vision exactly what my father thought he was doing to me, charming me away from her, making me dissatisfied and discontented with the kind of life she had arranged for me, subtly preparing for the day when I would break away from her and turn to him.

She ruffled my hair with a surprisingly tender expression softening her face. "I suppose you don't have a very good time here, poor lamb. I'm so tied up with the theatre that I find it very hard to get away to do things I want to do with you. It's just as horrid for me as it is for you. . . ."

I looked at her carefully, wondering at this abrupt change of front. There was a slightly glazed look in her eyes too that I had learned over the years to recognize, and which showed that she was acting out a scene, in this case a scene of tenderness with her only son.

I made a sharp movement, knowing that it would remove the glazed look from her eyes and bring her back into the room with me. Her eyes cleared and she smiled her irresistible gamine smile.

"I'd forgotten how fast you've been growing up," she said. "You've grown out of toys, and walks in the park. I'll have to think of something."

She turned to the mirror to adjust the diamond clip in her red woollen toque, and the answer to her problem came at once. The glamour of the theatre would balance the glamour of Max's prosperity, and of "abroad." She turned to me with a smile, the smile of the bright, gay person of the cocktail parties.

"Why don't you come down to the theatre this afternoon and watch the rehearsal? It might be fun for you. Go to the stage door and tell Shepherd who you are, I'll leave word with him to let you in. I hope you'll come, lamb, I really do." She darted a look at her watch. "I must run . . ." and she was gone.

Stoneham, Mother's maid, gave me lunch as soon as she was out of the house, and I ate the tasteless food indifferently. When I finished I went up to my room, and threw myself down on the bed, remembering resentfully just how Mother had said come down to the theatre. It was simply a dodge to get me out, and she was going to be there anyway so it was an amusement that wouldn't be any trouble to her. It wasn't a bit like the sort of thing Max thought of and arranged. I was in half a mind not to go, but still, it would be something to talk about when I went back to school.

An old man with a dirty yellow walrus mustache showed me the way into the darkened house with its twelve hundred empty seats. "Sit where you like, the whole kit and caboodle's yours fer the askin'."

He left me in the twilight. I took a seat in the front of the dress circle and stared down at my mother and the little group of people in street clothes standing chatting idly on the underlit stage mysteriously scattered with cheap bent wood chairs. Four men in their shirtsleeves were arguing over something in the fourth row of the orchestra seats. I recognized Larry Brook by the way he kept running his hand over the back of his head, but I didn't know the others.

In bitter disappointment I listened to the faint murmuring of their talk and remembered the blaze and glory of Antony and Cleopatra. What was going on? Larry straightened up suddenly and called out, "We'll do that again—as it stands, just once more please. From 'Not if I can help it,' Mortimer's exit and Naomi's entrance. And let's not gabble it this time. Let's have the timing." The group on the stage broke up and organized itself into a pattern. My mother, who had been standing in a relaxed easy position, took a few strides across the stage and stopped. As she stood there I had a curious impression that she gained a few inches in height, and her face, which had been a pink blob, suddenly took on features and an expression of great happiness, it was as if she was a light which had suddenly been turned on. And when I turned from her to the other actors I saw that they

had all, to a greater or lesser extent, illumined themselves in the same way. And then for ten minutes the stage and the theatre were filled with words and movement, with the almost incomprehensible fragment of a play which none the less held me spell-bound until its flow was rudely broken into by the man sitting beside Larry.

"No! No!" He cried as if in agony, waving a sheet of paper over his head. "Break there, please."

While I watched the little figures on the stage Larry Brook came down the gangway and without noticing me slumped into a seat not far off. Looking along the curve of the empty front row I could just see his face, and I was surprised by it. I'd always seen him looking professionally boyish and cheerful at parties, and now he looked lined and worried. As he sat there, he became aware that he was being watched and looking round quickly saw me. For a second an expression of annoyance crossed his face, and then he recognized me.

"Hallo, Dickie," he said. He came over, pulling his face muscles to attention so that when he reached me he had become the boy wonder once more, all youthful charm.

"I didn't know you had a taste for this sort of punishment. It's hell, isn't it?"

"I think it's terrific."

"Well, you wouldn't if you had another three weeks of it ahead of you. There's no torture like pulling a play into its final shape. By the time this thing goes up to Birmingham for the tryout I'll be an old, old man."

He looked down at the stage. "It's fun seeing the stuff I've written slowly turning into that thing down there, and it's extraordinary to see a character you've imagined being turned into a real person by your mother. She has the most amazing way of sensing the whole of what you've seen in your mind and bringing it to life in front of you. She's the kind of actress playwrights dream about."

It was indeed a wonderful thing to watch, and I spent day after day in the dark and silent upper part of the theatre staring down at the transformation that took place. One by one the awkward lines were weeded out, dead patches were removed, and clarifications of obscurities written in. As I came to understand the way the theatre puts flesh onto the bones of a play I got to know the theatre people. Warmed by my wholehearted admiration Larry became a friend, I met and was tolerated by the producer, and even Kenning, the quiet-voiced, beautifully dressed businessman who was the god who called this whole self-contained universe of pretense into being, would nod and smile as he went past me on his mysterious occasions. The scenery arrived, the props, and at last the costumes. In the end I sat in my usual place watching the piece as a whole declaring itself in its completeness in that magic pool of light, a play at last.

In those weeks of work my mother changed too. She had ceased to be my mother, she was no kinswoman of the Queen of Egypt I had once seen, she was the wife of the Governor of a British Colony suddenly swept off her feet and head over heels in love with a visitor to her husband's domain. For the first time I realized that she too was a creative artist in her way, that she was in some sort the equal of Max, although her inventions died nightly as the theatre lights went out and could not be put in bookcases alongside his fifty novels, and his volumes of short stories.

When I went back to school after that holiday I did not dream so much about returning to France to live, I thought instead about the theatre. I would become a stage manager, like Ibsen, and I would work at it until the theatre was a machine that I knew better than I knew myself, and then I would write play after play that used its capacities to the utmost. I would add a new chapter to the history of the stage, it would be Shakespeare, Ibsen, Shaw, and Savage.

As I formulated these ambitions I discovered that I had inherited my mother's gift, though I did not make the discovery by reasoning about it. I started to write plays. I would rough out a plot, fit the characters with names, and visualize the settings in my imagination. I might get as far as the dialogue for Scene One, Act I, or even into Scene Two, writing in the back of a school

exercise book, or on a lined pad such as my father used for his first drafts, on the dining table at home. My imagination would run ahead of me.

The play was finished. Kenning and Archer, the professional management team who had my mother under contract, had read it. Kenning came from behind his desk as I was shown into his office in the Adelphi, smiling his slightly twisted ironic smile, and holding out his hard, firm hand in greeting.

"We're tremendously excited about this play of yours, Richard, it's the real right thing beyond any question. We're going to do it this autumn. . . ." I sat in the stalls watching the rehearsals in the center of the little group of executives, brilliantly improvising new lines when called on to do so, and coaching the actors with suggestions that won the admiration of the producer, who quickly realized that he was my subordinate rather than a collaborator.

I woke from one of these reveries to find myself sitting facing Larry Brook in a tea shop in Knightsbridge. He was drinking his second cup and staring thoughtfully at me over its rim.

"Well, where have you been, and who have you been?" he said as I blinked at him. "You know, I met you on the street, and you just didn't know me, and when I spoke to you you didn't hear me. When I first caught sight of you you looked so like dear Naomi that it gave me quite a turn.

"What were you? A soldier? An enormously important statesman? Or an actor worshipped by thousands of idiotic fans?"

"How did you know?" I asked.

"I don't know your mother and work with her for nothing." He smiled again, a little sourly, looking down into his cup.

"I've no right to talk to you like this, but somebody ought to. I'm not saying your mother isn't a very wonderful woman, but she has a weakness. She gets hold of some story that interests her or amuses her, and she turns it into a story about herself. Somebody in the story attracts her and she becomes that other person. Sometimes she prefers the stories she makes up about herself to the facts. I'm not calling her a liar mind you. . . . It's like some-

one who has a wardrobe full of beautiful clothes, some are prettier than others and she prefers to wear them."

"It's like being able to choose who you are, instead of having to be who you are," I said.

Larry looked at me sharply. "That's it. You seem to know how it works." He poured himself another cup of tea, and shifted uneasily on the uncomfortable chair.

"Larry, Mr. Brook," I said. "Why is everything about us so odd? I mean about me, my father and mother. Why does Mother always try to pretend Father doesn't exist? Why don't they ever see each other, or talk about each other? Why didn't my father ever come near me until I was nearly ten years old? What is it all supposed to be about?"

Larry looked at me in astonishment, and I looked back at him with almost as much surprise, the questions seemed so obvious now that they were in words.

While I sat half-elated at having discovered the cause of the vague ill-defined malaise which had been growing heavier and heavier on my mind for so long, and half-horrified to find out what it was, Larry looked at me, and once or twice opened his mouth as if he were going to say something before he actually spoke.

"These things are difficult to explain to anyone, and they're almost impossible to explain in your case because, if you won't be hurt by my saying it, you're still a child. I know you feel immensely grown up because you've been wearing long pants with your school suits for the last term or two. But there's an awful lot to learn still. I've been trying to find out ever since I was your age, and I haven't made out an awful lot, you've probably noticed it in my plays.

"If I could answer your questions I'd be terrific, Ibsen wouldn't be in it, or Chekhov. You know what was wrong with my last play, or perhaps you don't. I wanted to show them an intensely respectable woman suddenly picked up and swept away by an intensely unrespectable storm of emotion—and I couldn't do it because I just didn't really know how that kind of woman lives. You see, I'm a competent playwright, not a genius. Now,

your mother—she's a genius. She saw what I was trying to do. and she knew all about that kind of woman. She's been to Cheltenham, where my woman was supposed to have come from, a couple of times—with touring companies in the old days—and I suppose she'd seen that kind of life out of the windows of trains and taxis. And after she was successful she met that kind of person now and again at weekend parties and dinners-I don't know how she did it but out of that she lived that life in her mind, from birth to death. She had that life all ready in her wardrobe, and when she read my play it was there waiting for her to put on. Your father's the same, you see him in his books. Some people get cross with him because he always comes into thembut he's always in a new life even if you can recognize his dark brown eyes and so forth, when he describes the hero. He makes up a complete story about himself. He gossips—or rather he listens to gossip. He'll sit and listen to anyone for hours if they'll really tell him all about their troubles, he drinks it in, all the endless little details about how they felt, and what they wanted, and what actually happened. He hasn't got the time to live the hundreds of lives he needs for his books so he sucks up other people's lives, and then he goes off and dreams himself through the stories he's been told. I used to get on very well with him, we used to see a great deal of each other at one time. It lasted for a couple of years—then he suddenly dropped me. He's found out all he wanted to know about me-he wanted me to be the successful young playwright in that book of his, Man's Estate or rather it was the other way round. Man's Estate's more about Max if he had lived my life than it is about me, really.

"You see they're both so wonderful at making up stories on the strength of a few facts that they don't pay attention to the humdrum sort of stories that most people live out. They met, they fell in love, and they both made up wonderful stories about what the rest of their lives were going to be, and what the other person was like. And when they started living together they found how different the stories were, and how badly they fitted into each other's stories. They felt they'd been terribly deceived, they were angry, and bitterly hurt. If you ever write you'll realize how infuriating it would be to find that your characters were rearranging your stories behind your back. Generally there's a quick cure—they scrap the old story and rewrite another one that puts it right out of their minds."

Larry paused and fiddled with his cup as if he was reading a fortune in the tea leaves. "All I can see is a thing like a squashed parrot," he murmured.

"You don't believe in telling fortunes, do you?" I said.

"No—well, that is, yes," said Larry, "though I don't mean tea leaves, or anything like that. I mean I can tell your fortune up to a point. You see, when your father and mother scrapped the stories they'd written about each other and set out to write new ones they couldn't scrap you. No matter how much rewriting they did you were still there—oh, I can see the difficulty of it, clearly enough, though I don't suppose you can. I've written things and seen they were no good and thrown them out. I can't imagine what it would be like if one of the characters out of those plays refused to disappear, but hung round, developing his own traits, and making more and more insistent demands for a place in my work. It would be ghastly, and I'd be furious."

He paused again and eyed me. "I'm not being very kind to you, I'm afraid—but I'm being honest with you because I like you. I'll tell you your fortune—you're going to be miserable for a few years because you're going to try to force your way into your parents' stories about themselves—it can't be done. You won't have any sort of happiness until you give it up. . . ." He leaned forward, looking down at his neatly manicured hands. "If you've got their gift for making stories, for God's own sake keep it out of your life. Whenever you find yourself making a story about yourself instead of living with the facts fight your way back into the daylight. It's the only thing to do. . . . I shouldn't have said all this, I know, it's busybodyish and awful of me. But you looked so lost on the street just now, so Goddamned defenseless that it brought out the rescue worker in me." He laughed, and I found myself laughing with him.

We parted outside the tea shop. Larry jumped into a taxi and went off to his bright, glittering, enviable life, while I walked

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home. It was getting dark, and the streets were full of the stir and bustle of Christmas time.

I found my mother waiting for me in the drawing room, sitting on the sofa with a letter from my father on the low lacquered table in front of her. Her manner as she made me sit beside her, and as she stroked my hair, with a fond caressing hand, was affectionate in a way which, combined with the letter, made me uneasy.

"Dickie, are you counting terribly much on Christmas here with me? I hope you aren't—because your father has taken it into his head to want you to come over to him. I think it's crazy of him to uproot you suddenly like this only a week before Christmas—but he's written to me begging for you to come—he's never given you a Christmas—he seems to want to before you're too grown up to enjoy it. He's such a baby—he loves giving people parcels to open, and arranging surprises. Would you very much hate to go? I know that Essling-Sterlinghoven woman he lives with is pretty tiresome, but it would be a wonderful thing for him if you could bear it. It'll be sad for me, and I'll miss you, but I have you all the time after all, and it doesn't seem fair of me to hold onto you when it seems to mean so much to him. . . ."

When she had gone through the motions of letting me decide whether or not I would accept Max's invitation she became a good deal more natural. She was the gamine rather than the tender mother when she told me that she'd known all along that I wouldn't be able to resist the idea of Christmas with Max and that she was so sure of it that she'd already got the tickets and seat reservations for the journey. It was with the gesture of a naughty little girl that she produced the envelope from the travel agency containing these things: "You see, I had them ready—just in case."

I looked at the tickets and saw that they were marked for a longer journey that I had expected, that I was to ride through the night, southwards, clear across France to Cannes. I looked at her in surprise, murmuring, "But these are . . ."

"Oh yes, that's part of the fun of it for Max. He's got a house he's terribly proud of down at Antibes—he's dying to show it you—I expect it will be lovely, and the journey will be fun too. You'll wake up somewhere beyond Arles, and by the time you've dressed and breakfasted you'll be looking out at the Mediterranean. I wish I could go with you, darling. Now, I've got to run." She gathered up my father's letter with a swift gesture and put it in her bag.

"Kiss me, there's a love. I know you'll have a happy time with Max. Good night. . . ."

She swirled out of the room, leaving behind the dying fragrance of her delicious scent.

My mother was not awake when I left to catch the boat train on the following morning, and for the first time I felt depressed as I crossed the Channel.

My father met me at the station in Cannes, friendly and smiling, but with a certain reserve which puzzled me. He didn't drive straight over to his house at Antibes, but took me to lunch at a small restaurant in Cannes itself where we ate in unusual constraint.

My second glass of Traminer was untouched in front of me when I reached out for my coffee cup.

"Don't do that—finish your wine first—" said Max, almost snapping at me. Then modifying his tone he said, "You see, once you've tasted the coffee the wine will seem sour. . . . I'm sorry to be ill tempered, but I'm in the middle of a lot of things just now—I'm finishing a book—and, well, there are other complications. Your visit isn't as convenient at it could be. Of course I like having you around—but some times are more convenient than others, and this isn't one of the better times . . ."

I looked at him with surprise and disappointment.

"I could go home if you like—I only came because Mother told me you'd begged her to let me spend Christmas with you. . . ."

My father was lighting a cigar. He abruptly flicked the match out and put the cigar down.

"She . . . told . . . you . . ." His face was red with anger, then his eyes twinkled and he burst into a laugh. "Oh, it isn't possible . . . Naomi's the devil . . ." He fell back in his chair, laughing until the tears rolled down his cheeks. "How could she have thought she was going to get away with that one. . . ." he said.

I wondered for a moment if he was out of his mind. There seemed nothing funny in my mother's telling me that he had wanted me to spend Christmas with him.

"Well, let this be a lesson to you," he said at last wiping his eyes, "when you've learnt to understand your mother you'll know more about women than anybody who ever lived." He searched for his pocketbook and drew a letter out of it. "This is cheating really, but we're playing a game that hasn't any rules. Listen to this. . . .

"'Dear Max. I know you're a very busy man, and very much wrapped up in your affairs, but I think you should occasionally give a thought to other people's interests. I don't know if you've ever thought that Dickie always visits you when you happen to feel like having him, and I don't suppose that you've ever thought that there are other times when he very much longs to be with you. I was talking to him the other day, just after his birthday, and he said to me that he wondered why he'd never had anything like a birthday or Christmas with you. I said you were a very busy man, and he said rather sadly that the fathers of the other boys he knew were very busy too, but they had time to make nice Christmases and birthdays all the same. I put it to you that you really ought to make the effort this year and give him a really good Christmas. He's a funny dreamy boy and he's getting into the awkward age and I'm rather worried about the adjustment he's going to make to life. I really feel that it would make a tremendous difference to him if you could have him this Christmas. . . . '"

While my father read this letter the sense of going into exile which had obsessed me all through the long journey from London returned with redoubled force. I looked away from my father, across the harbor crowded with elegant yachts, to the old

town whose mound of reddish roofs was crowned with a square church tower; a strange place, filled with strange people, of whom I knew nothing. But then, so was Castlereagh Gardens, and my home. I looked away from the alien town to my father's face and met his eyes. He gave me a look full of complicity and understanding to which I replied with a grin.

"Well, that makes us allies, fellow victims," he said, all friendliness and geniality again. He blew out a thin jet of cobalt-blue cigar smoke and his expression became thoughtful.

"I feel pretty badly about what's happened to you in these last few years," he said, "but believe me it wasn't altogether my fault. Your mother's a very difficult woman at times—she's like a cat—she can't bring herself to do anything the simple ordinary way. She always has to go round a thing and round it, and then up to it sideways—it makes life difficult for those who are close to her. When I do a thing I put down my cards face upwards. I like things to be simple. Your mother couldn't stand that . . . but let's forget these far-off unhappy things. What's happened can't be helped. We'd best try to make a go of things as they are. . . ."

He tapped two inches of ash off the end of his cigar into an ash tray, and sighed.

"You got on pretty well with Lolotte, didn't you? At any rate she likes you, and I hope you'll get on with her. She's staying with me just now. Don't let her way of saying things to shock people upset you—she can't help doing it and she doesn't mean any harm by it. Every now and then she says things that get me rattled—you may think we're quarreling, but it's all in fun really. I'm just telling you this now so that you won't be surprised by the way she behaves. She's a handful, but I'm very fond of her." He looked at his wrist watch. "She's having lunch with a friend in town, she's going to meet us here and then we're going to drive out to the farm. I expect she'll be here in about a quarter of an hour—she's a quarter of an hour late now and half an hour is her usual amount of leeway." Exasperation gleamed in his eyes for a moment. "I've argued with her about it time and time and time again, but she just can't keep an appointment. . . . I know

what, though, we'll show her we're men of spirit. There's a record shop just down the street where they have Spanish music—wonderful stuff—we'll go and get you some and when we come back she'll be waiting for us."

The record shop was next to a fish market, and it produced sardanas that astonished and delighted me. Max bought me a dozen records, telling me while he did so all about the Arab kingdoms in Spain, about Granada, and the great mosque at Seville. The minutes ran by very pleasantly, and when we came back to the restaurant the Grafin Essling-Sterlinghoven was waiting for us, sitting with a little white dog in her lap. She looked very German in a black leather coat under which she was wearing a white woollen dress. She was a little thinner than when I had last seen her, and a little more beautiful.

"Dickie," she said, "see how abominably your father treats me—I wait for him where he tells me to wait, patiently, like a dog. When you get back home you can tell your mother how he humiliates me—that is what he wishes—she will snigger at me as all these waiters are sniggering at me—tell her my life is one long round of such humiliations. . . ."

"Oh, damn," said my father, with his voice rising to a squeak, "you know very well . . ."

"There now, he curses me in front of his son. . . ." She raised her eyes to heaven, like a martyr. "One lives a hard life when one sacrifices oneself to the caprices of a genius . . . Meanwhile take the dog so that I can hug Dickie. . . ." She took my hands and stared at me with a strange intensity, eying me from top to toe. "You have grown. You are tall—taller than your father already—'you are turning into a man—what hideous clothes you English make your children wear. . . ."

"It's the school uniform," I said weakly.

"It is gray and horrible," she said. "We will go and buy you French clothes and you can pretend you are a *lycéen* and not an English schoolboy. I will pretend you are my son while you are here—the son I should have made Max give me."

In spite of Max's objections she bore me off and presently I

was dressed up in a fantastic French imitation of English sports clothes, with a wonderfully fluffy tweed jacket, and monstrous brogues with soles nearly an inch and a half thick. I resisted a beret, and she gave way unwillingly.

"You are only fifteen, and you are already hidebound. It is a terrible thing to be English—terrible. Wear it just for a moment to see. You will look dashing and handsome, I promise you." Lolotte popped the beret on my head—"There, you see, you will be irresistible—I cannot resist you. I must kiss you now." I stiffened as she embraced me, and looked over her shoulder into the grinning face of the tailor. Lolotte recoiled.

"Do you always turn to wood when a woman kisses you—you are not like your father. . . ." I blushed, and was ashamed of blushing, of having blood, of being alive. "I see, I see, I understand." She held up her hands in astonishment. "You are a virgin—you are afraid of girls! Max, it is incredible how Naomi has brought up this son of yours. . . ."

"Lolotte!" cried my father.

". . . he is gauche, he does not know what to do with his hands, he cannot speak, he has no experience. . . ."

"Lolotte!"

"How can you bear it that that woman should let your son become such a hobbledehoy. . . ."

Other assistants in the store, other customers edged up to watch the strange spectacle. I was as red as a beetroot, Max, much the same color, pushed a handful of money into the shopman's grasp and propelled us both out of the shop.

As we drove out to Les Orangers in the Voisin I sat in the back and Lolotte and Max argued furiously in the front seat. ". . . incredible piece of idiotic vulgarity . . ."

"Vulgarity—you dare to talk to me of vulgarity—you are a man of the people, a proletarian—you know nothing about how to give a boy a decent upbringing. You . . ."

"Don't talk to me about decency, after that exhibition. You don't know the first thing about decency. . . ."

"You hypocrite. You, you who sleep with me in all the hotels

in Europe, and parade me as your mistress wherever you go—you lecture me on decency and propriety. . . ."

I cowered in the back seat near to tears. Lolotte was mad, my father was mad, and how could my mother have betrayed me into the hands of this pair of lunatics for my Christmas holidays.

The tension did not diminish as we drove out of Cannes into the hills behind it, and we got out of the car at the end of the dirt road which led up to it in an uneasy silence. I liked the look of Les Orangers, an old farmhouse standing among olive trees on a terraced hillside. Lolotte showed me to my room as if she were anxious to get rid of me, and having thrust me in through its doorway ran off to resume her quarrel with Max.

That evening there was a dinner party at Les Orangers, as perplexing as the other events of the day, though wholly unlike them. Lolotte appeared at it in the role of a gracious hostess, courteous, and ripplingly conversational in the most conventional way as she played up to my father, who presided over the whole thing as a solemn man of affairs. I watched the faces of the guests as they drank martinis before dinner, while they ate their way through the five-course meal, and afterwards when the women had left the table and the men were left to their brandy and cigars, waiting to catch the slight look of irony, of amused contempt, that showed that they knew they were at the table of a buffoon whose woman dragged him into one fantastic public humiliation after another. They eyed him appraisingly, but seriously, and when there was laughter they were laughing with him and not at him. When the talk turned to grave political matters over the brandy they listened to his opinions, and it became clear to me that they respected him. ". . . as I see it this lunatic French policy of punishing Germany, and humiliating it, is just beginning to make itself felt. The democratic Germany that we all had such hopes of after the war is finished—the French burked it—they did everything they could to prove it wasn't a reality and now it isn't. The country's drifting into something much worse than we've seen yet. Oh, I know those old boys, the military clique, were pretty bad, but they were nothing to this Brown Shirt crowd—I went to a meeting in Leipzig a couple of months ago and I listened to a lunatic dervish—a fellow called Hitler—the crowd lapped it up, and his rowdies marched through the streets as if they owned them—that's the man who's going to take over Germany in a year or two—and when he does, then you'll see something. I tell you the Europe we've known all our lives is breaking up. That Russian thing was only a beginning, those weren't Asiatic horrors—they're the horrors of a new time. . . ."

The talk drifted off in the direction of anecdotes about Mussolini, Diego Rivera, De Valera, and the new race of strong men who were plaguing Europe. It was conversation of a kind that I had never listened to before and I was excited: under Max's wing I was entering a world of vast extent in which the affairs of the theatre seemed very small beer.

The next two days were pleasant ones. The olive orchard behind Les Orangers ran up to the summit of a small hill, which was a plateau some fourteen or fifteen acres in extent planted with white jasmine and lavender, grown for the scent manufactured in Grasse. From this level piece of ground one looked over a gentle valley partly given over to flower-growing for the same purpose, and partly given over to olive trees. Beyond that the foothills of the Alpes Maritimes covered with pine forests rose until they merged with the snowy crests of the main mountain ridge some thirty or forty miles away. I wandered happily through the valley guided by the little white dog, who took me to call on all his friends in the neighborhood.

At lunch on the terrace the third day we looked down and saw the postman wheeling his bicycle up the road. He waved when he saw us looking down at him and, leaning his machine against a tree, shambled up through the garden in his dusty boots, pulling his cap off and taking a telegram from inside its greasy band as he came. As he came onto the terrace he saluted Max and myself with a mock-military flourish and handed the pale green

envelope to Lolotte. She opened it and gave an extravagant cry of surprise.

"It's from my niece Ermine—she can get away to spend Christmas with us. . . ."

"Oh blast," said Max. "How am I to get any work done if you fill the place with your relatives? We'll give LeNormand a reply—tell your precious Ermine that the house is full—that we can't put her up. . . ."

"It's too late," said Lolotte, quickly, "she's on her way. The telegram says she arrives in Cannes tonight. . . ."

"Oh, very well—I suppose it can't be helped. It's all right, LeNormand, there's no answer. Have a glass of wine before you go."

LeNormand drank his *petit verre* at a gulp, smacked his lips, bowed to us all and departed. After he had gone there was a brief silence.

"Just what are you up to, Lolotte?" said Max, looking at her with his head slightly on one side. She looked demure.

"But nothing, Max—nothing, it's just that I am fond of Ermine, and I wanted to have the poor girl with me for Christmas—it is a small pleasure for me—please don't deny it. You have your Richard—why shouldn't I have my Ermine? I am fond of my family even though I pretend not to be."

"Well, you might have let me know—at least," said Max, "still it can't be helped now—and anyway she'll be company for Dickie."

"That's what I was thinking of," said Lolotte with dovelike innocence. Half an hour later we drove down into Cannes to do our Christmas shopping, and to meet Ermine.

I liked Ermine from the minute that I saw her walking out of the station with Lolotte. She gave me a warm grin and looked me in the eyes with a friendly, conspiratorial expression. A tall fair girl with a snub nose and a big mouth, she was two or three years older than I. My first impression was that she was ugly, but by the time I was shaking hands with her I realized that she was pretty in an unfamiliar way.

There was an odd flavor to the day after Ermine's arrival. There was a tension in the air involving my father, Lolotte, and the girl which centered strangely on myself. I couldn't make it out. On the morning of Christmas Eve Ermine suggested that we explore and we walked over to the silent and abandoned farm buildings of La Garderie. When we were halfway there my father came hurrying up behind us.

"I didn't feel like working. I thought I'd come along with you." He was badly out of breath, as if he'd run to catch us up. I was surprised that he should have interrupted his morning's work, but pleased. He talked amusingly about the neighborhood, the Roman remains near by, the Saracen pirates who used to raid the district in the Middle Ages, and about Mirabeau, who came from Grasse.

At lunch Lolotte drew Ermine out and she talked gaily and amusingly about her family and her life in Germany. Max sat at the end of the table in an unusual silence. He watched Ermine most of the time, but every now and then he gave a quick searching look at me or at Lolotte. I couldn't make it out.

After lunch we sat drinking our coffee in an awkward silence until Ermine said, "Aunt Lolotte, may I take the Mercedes this afternoon? I want to go down into Nice. Richard will drive with me and see that I don't go too fast."

"Of course," said Lolotte.

"It's ridiculous," said Max, "you can't dream of turning those two children loose with that racing car. They'll kill themselves. I'll drive you in the Voisin, if you really want to go."

Ermine gave a quick look at Lolotte and shrugged her shoulders.

"You're being absurd, Max," cried Lolotte. "Ermine has been driving for years. She's driven the Mercedes hundreds of miles—it's perfectly all right."

"That's all very well, but Naomi would never forgive me if anything happened to Dickie," said Max. "I can't take the responsibility. I'm afraid it's out of the question."

"Naomi! That woman wouldn't care if . . ."

"Now Lolotte, I won't have you abusing Naomi—you've promised—remember . . ."

A furious argument broke out. Ermine got to her feet. "I've got a headache, I think I'll go and lie down." She disappeared. A few seconds later Lolotte followed her. "I'll get the child some aspirin."

My father and I sat in silence for a time, and then he too got up and stalked indoors. I felt angry and humiliated. I had been treated as a child in public, and I knew that it would have been fun to go into Nice with Ermine.

I left the terrace and walked over to the water-tower. There was a big fig tree sprawling over its roof that looked as if it would be easy to climb, and I made my way up its silver-gray branches. I found that the tiles of the roof were warm from the sun and I sat on them feeling comforted. Les Orangers down the slope, half-hidden by the olives, dwarfed by the long line of the Alpes Maritimes, looked like a doll's house.

Max, a small bustling figure, came walking out along the cart track leading up the hill, calling to me: "Richard, oh, Richard, Richard . . ." In aggravation I lay down, flattening myself against the tiles. He passed by, calling me again and again, and the silence returned.

Three sparrows brawled over some morsel a little way from me. I raised myself on my elbows and watched them. Suddenly they lifted themselves into the air. I looked around to see what had alarmed them. Ermine's wide mouth smiled at me over the edge of the roof through the branches of the fig tree. She climbed onto the tiles and sat down beside me, brushing the hair out of her eyes. "I saw you from my window and I thought I'd come up and join you."

"I didn't see you coming."

"I came round the back of the hill—Max's down by Le Putier—still searching for you. I was dodging him. That's why I came the long way."

She giggled. She was wearing the shortest shorts I had ever seen. She took a grass stem out of her mouth and tickled my ear with it.

"It's funny, Richard, but I feel as if I'd known you for a long time. It's nice when you feel somebody is sympathetic, isn't it?"

I didn't want to stare at her legs, but I couldn't help it. She stretched them out. "I've got pretty legs, haven't I?"

I felt myself blushing scarlet. "Yes," I muttered. She giggled again. "You said that just as if you were under water, yeughle. You've never kissed a girl, have you?" I shook my head. "Well, try, you've got to begin sometime."

The enormous sky arched over the roof seemed like a huge staring eye fixed upon me, I felt horribly self-conscious as I gave her a swift peck on the cheek. "That's no good, that's definitely beginner's stuff," she said. "No marks for technique, and none for effort. Now I'll show you."

It was, after a first uneasy second in which I felt I was suffocating, very enjoyable.

"There," said Ermine, "now you try." I tried. "Much better. But next time hold me as if you meant it. I won't fall apart. Women don't like to be touched uncertainly. You mustn't let them feel you are unsure of yourself. Here endeth the first lesson."

She sat with crossed legs looking at me. "Let's have a cigarette."

"I don't smoke," I said.

"You should," she said, "it looks *mondaine*, and besides, it makes all sorts of things easier. You know, you put your heads close together over a match, and so forth and so on. . . ."

She blew a thin jet of smoke out of her nose. "Half the battle at this stage in life is looking experienced, even if you aren't. You know, when you look at my legs and feel excited you shouldn't show it. You ought to look at them like a connoisseur. Drop your eyelids a little, and look at them slowly—like this." Her eyes traveled dreamily over me. "Men's bodies are nice," she said. "I adore their backs and hips."

I sat like a pudding with my eyes cast down, I didn't dare to look at her.

"What the devil are you two doing up there?" Max was standing in the yard staring up at us, looking hot and cross.

"That roof is as rotten as a pear. Do you want to break your necks? Come down at once. I've been looking for you everywhere, Richard, didn't you hear me calling you?"

"No," I said over my shoulder, halfway down the fig tree, "I didn't hear anything."

When I was on the ground I looked up at Ermine climbing down. Under her boy's shirt you could see that her long straight back ran into her hips very cleanly. I had never looked at a woman that way before. I had looked at the photographs of show girls and acrobatic dancers in the magazines, in a furtive way when I thought that I was alone, but never at a person. Seven or eight feet from the ground Ermine turned, rounding the tree. "I'm going to jump; give me a hand, Richard."

I stepped forward and she jumped down into my arms, resting her hands on my shoulders. We held the pose for a second or two longer than was, strictly speaking, necessary. She looked over my shoulder at Max with a curious expression.

"Lolotte wants you down at the house," he said. She ran off, with her golden hair flying, and we walked after her in silence.

"You're growing fast, Dickie," said Max. "You're in a hurry to be a man. I know. I felt it at your age. But don't try to force things. I was in too much of a hurry and I hurt myself. Don't make the same mistake. You've all the time in the world ahead of you."

I had no idea what he was talking about, so I said nothing. We walked on, our footfalls scarcely making a sound in the soft powdered dust of the cart track.

"If you start . . . to live . . . too soon, the way I did, you get some funny ideas about life. You get an idea that women can give you something that you can only give yourself. Because you don't realize that, you go from woman to woman looking for it. Each one is a disappointment, and you move on. Take it slow, and wait until the right woman comes along when you're good and ready for her. Flirting and playing the fool doesn't do you any good in the long run. I've found that out."

I began to understand, I had done wrong in kissing Ermine on the roof. He patted my shoulder.

"I don't want to be a spoil sport, I'm just passing on the fruit of some bitter experience to you for your own good. There, I think I've made myself pretty clear, that's enough of that."

He brightened. "I thought I'd take you into Grasse, we can get some scent as a Christmas present for young Ermine. Grasse is a jolly place, when you get to know it."

We whirled off in the Voisin, the men by themselves. We bought a huge bottle of Rose-Geranium for Ermine, and some little eighteenth-century toys in an antique shop. We visited the birthplace of Mirabeau. We visited the Musée Fragonard. As the dangerous hours flowed away Max talked about the memoirs of St.-Simon, and the Revolution. He was in the mood to suggest that Fragonard's delicate improprieties were a part of the corruption that bred the Revolution, and he drew a powerful moral lesson from the dark tempest of Mirabeau's life. I was impressed, but several times I found my thoughts wandering off to Ermine as we drove home, contented, with our parcels.

After dinner Max and Lolotte read while Ermine and I played chess. Ermine was wearing a low-cut full-skirted evening dress of dark red that flattered the skin of her very bare shoulders. I found myself looking into the front of her dress more and more often as she leant over the low chess table to make her moves.

Presently Ermine got up and stretched. "Two wins for you and a draw for me—you'll have to give me my revenge tomorrow, Richard. I'm too sleepy to play any more tonight. I feel stuffy. Let's go for a little walk before we go to bed."

"I shouldn't if I were you," said Max, "the bottom's fallen out of the thermometer. There's quite a sharp frost. You'll catch your death of cold in that dress. And anyway, I'd like a game of chess with Dickie before I turn in. Set up the board, old man." He came over smiling genially and held me down in my seat with a surprisingly firm hand.

"Good night, everybody," Ermine said, and she vanished with a flounce of her wide skirt.

I lost a game quickly to my father, then another, and went off to bed. While I undressed I heard Lolotte and Max quarreling in the living room along the hallway. Their raised voices

got on my nerves. I lay down but I couldn't sleep. I went over to the open window. The moon was setting and the hills were silhouetted in velvety black against the pale ashen sky.

There was a faint rustling noise along the wall to my right. A black shape was crawling along the roof of the dining arbor on the terrace below in my direction.

"Qui est là? . . ."

"Who do you think, you idiot," whispered Ermine. "This roof's as slippery as glass." She inched up to the window. "Give me a hand." She came in over the sill like a big fish. Her hands were icy cold, and she was shivering under her thin pyjamas. She dived into the bed. "Come and hug me tight before I die of cold." She flung the covers up over her head. I looked at the shape of her body under the bedclothes and suddenly realized, trembling a little, though not with cold, what the game of hide and seek we had been playing all day was about.

I got into bed beside Ermine. We lay in each other's arms in a warm ecstasy of silent laughter which dissolved into a happy, golden seriousness. I discovered that Ermine's skin smelt faintly of honey. I slept very well indeed.

On Christmas day we were all very cheerful and it was a happy week which followed. By day Ermine and I kept up the pretense that we were trying to escape Max and, with mock dismay, allowed him to frustrate us. His feeling that he was saving my innocence preserved his good humor. Lolotte, though I didn't know it, was being kept fully informed of our progress by Ermine, and the success of her plan kept her in a state of bubbling amusement. On our last night together Ermine told me all about the plan. She was sitting in the bed with her legs drawn up and her arms round her knees looking down into my face as I lay nestling up alongside her.

"It's a pity I've got to go tomorrow. I could have done with another week, couldn't you?"

I took her by the ankle and squeezed it. "I'd like to be with you all the time. I wish we could go on much, much longer."

"Well, we can't, and that's all there is to it." She looked at me and smiled, with the tip of her tongue between her bright teeth.

"You must promise not to be angry if I tell you, but you owe a great deal to Lolotte."

"Do I? What? . . ."

"Me. She's an extraordinary woman. The rest of the family rather despise her because she lives with Max. My father says she's disgraced herself—as if she'd gone off with a garage mechanic. We're all meant to marry soldiers. I'll probably marry a soldier soon, now that the army is getting back on its feet. Lolotte tells me I must save myself before that happens. She keeps telling me to get out of Germany. She's trying to get me a job in England through some friends of hers. We're conspirators against the family. She says they're part of the old Germany that's going to sink like a stone—but I don't know."

She took the cigarette out of her mouth and bent down to nibble my ear. "I was her Christmas present to you. She rang me up three days before I came and told me about you. How you fell over your feet and hands when there was a pretty woman in the room, and about the way you blushed, and how adorable and innocent you were. And she asked me to come and teach you how to be a man before you turned wooden like all the other English. Why do you suppose Max was so against it? Aren't people mysterious?"

For a moment I was angry and bitter, but not about that. "You did it all just for a joke, not because you liked me. . . ."

"Of course I liked you, I wouldn't have done it if you hadn't been nice. It's been lovely seeing you becoming sure of yourself. Besides, it feeds my vanity. You won't ever forget me, ever. You never forget your first. And if you have a career and become an important man I shall think there he is, I gave him his beginning in life."

I kissed the palm of her free hand. My brief anger with Lolotte passed by; whatever the terms might be on which I had arrived in bed with Ermine, she was a very wonderful Christmas present to get. We stopped talking, and I didn't think of her question again, until after I had said good-bye to her at Nice airport.

Her question revived itself to trouble me after she had gone

Popelved form

and I could see, in tranquillity, how much she had done for me. She had taught me to accept my sex without shame, and in her body she had shown me a world of pleasure without guilt. A great question about myself had been answered sweetly and simply. And Max had wished to deny me all that. Why? I couldn't make it out.

We went for a walk together the day before I left for England, along the abandoned single-line railroad track which wound through the hills from Grasse to Nice. We sauntered along its dead level for a mile or two in silence and then sat down on the edge of an embankment. Without thinking I pulled a packet of Gaulois out of my pocket and lit a cigarette.

"I didn't know that you smoked," said Max.

"I didn't. I just decided I'd start. Everyone else does."

"I suppose Ermine put you up to it, well, it can't be helped. I hope Naomi won't kick up a fuss. Thank goodness there isn't worse for her to make a fuss about."

I smiled inwardly, hoping that my expression was suitably bland and unrevealing. Max lit one of his own Egyptian cigarettes.

"I hope you aren't angry with me for the way I butted in on you and Ermine all the time she was here. I didn't want to spoil your fun, but I don't think you've had enough experience of life to know how to handle that kind of thing on your own. Ermine's like Lolotte—they belong to East Prussian families from way over on the Russian border. All that country has been marched through, fought over, and revolutioned, and counterrevolutioned, over three or four times, even in Ermine's lifetime. They've developed a queer sort of psychology unlike anything you've ever had to deal with. They snatch at things because if they wait for them life may snatch them away. I had an idea that when young Ermine set her pretty eyes on you she took it into her head to take a snatch at you. Well, I just didn't want to see you hurt, that's all. I know you're sensitive—a little too sensitive-and I think you've got to be a lot tougher before you can take on a heartless little animal like that. She'd have made you fond of her, and then as soon as something else came along that took her fancy she'd have been off with a hop, skip, and jump, and you'd have been pretty hard hit."

He looked at me wisely, and fondly.

"You know, Dickie, I feel more than usually responsible for you. I didn't mean to, but I've given you a rotten bad start in life. Naomi and I didn't hit it off, and we never got married. That's our affair, but people know about it. I've lived a funny complicated life, and there are a lot of stories about me going around. I've always been held back by a feeling that it would be unfair to you and unfair to Naomi to give you my side of the story. Naomi's a queer fish and she took the whole thing very hard after we broke up. She has an idea in her mind about the way things happened that isn't very much like the truth. I don't know just when she decided she was a wronged woman, but somewhere or other along the line of her development she decided it was so and she's felt worse and worse about it over the years. To tell the truth, though it's an ugly thing to say, she chucked herself at my head. There's over twenty years between us, you know. In those days I was at the height of my success, forty-two or three, and a public figure of a kind already. The papers used to run reports on what writers were up to in those days almost the way they cover the lives of film stars now. We had a certain glamor. Naomi was nineteen, turning twenty, and I suppose she fell for it. I photographed well in those days, and the papers used my photographs a lot . . . your height doesn't show in your photograph. . . . She found out where I lived and came for my autograph. I'd given orders to my manservant to turn away autograph hunters, and I never answered their letters. Naomi came two or three times and was turned away. I suppose that hardened her determination. She used to write to me every day, and she hung about in the lobby of the apartment house I lived in, and on the other side of the street. When I came out she used to hurry up to talk to me. I was irritated by it all for a long time. I gave the doormen orders not to let her into the lobby, and I'm afraid they were rude to her.

After that I'd often look out and see her standing across the street hoping to catch a sight of me. I was parted from my wife at that time-she lived down in Cornwall with my two boys. I felt lonely sometimes. When I was feeling lonely I'd often go to the window and look down and see all that adoration and devotion waiting for me down in the street-mine for the asking. She's a beautiful woman now, and she was a very lovely girl then-I don't know-there was a latent fire in her that was exciting. But as soon as I thought about it the stupidity of it overwhelmed me. I'd been in a sort of scandal a year or two before -with a married woman whose husband belonged to my club. There'd been a lot of talk. That was why my wife had left me. I didn't want to get into another scrape. I was involved in politics at that time too. There was a thing called the New World Society that was going to take England over and make it into a new heaven on earth. They were all political dreamers on the management committee and I was trying to shake them up and get them out of a cloud cuckooland of social and economic theorizing and to bring them down to earth. They hated me very bitterly for it, and I knew just what they'd do if they could get their teeth into another scandal about me. But in the end Naomi won. I came home from a noisy, nasty, argumentative New World meeting late one night. It was raining cats and dogs. I hadn't been able to get a cab, and I was horribly depressed because the old guard of the New Worlders had wangled a lot of trick voting for new members on the executive committee and all my nominees had been beaten badly. Naomi was in a doorway across the street, half soaked, with nothing but a newspaper over her head to protect her. I was furious with her for making such a spectacle of herself. The doormen used to make jokes about my admirer and I went up to her to tell her that if she didn't stop making a fool of herself and of me I'd go to the police.

"She was half scared and half delighted that I'd come up to her to speak to her, and she waited for what I was going to say, with her lips parted. There were beads of water on her upper lip . . . on her eyelashes, on her eyebrows, at the ends of those draggles of hair. I didn't scold her, I said, 'You'd better come in and have a hot bath before you catch your death of cold.' She smiled, a timid smile with a hint of triumph about it, I can remember the way she dropped the paper, and picked up the hem of her skirt so that it wouldn't drag in the mud as we crossed the street to the apartment house. She took a tub in the old children's bathroom while I had one in mine. Then we sat in the kitchen in bathrobes and had scrambled eggs and drank hot tea. She told me how she'd been in drama school, how she'd traveled with a touring company, how she was going to be the greatest actress of them all—Duse, Rachel, Bernhardt—they were going to be nothing to her. I sat there and listened, and I loved her beauty, and her greed for life, for success, and for me. That's how it all started. . . ."

Max pulled up a small weed and shredded the leaves off its wiry stem one by one. A faint thymey smell filled our nostrils.

"Well, there's no use crying over spilt milk. But if Naomi ever tells you that she was wickedly seduced by an older man who took advantage of her youth and inexperience you'll know what to think."

I got to my feet and stood beside him wondering what to say. Well, I thought, I am a man now, thanks to my Ermine. I can go ahead with my own life, I can leave behind all this warfare in the heart in which I have no part. My life is my life, I have escaped from Mother's life, and from my father's. I put my hand on his shoulder with deep affection and with pity, it was a gesture at once of consolation and of farewell. He sighed. "You've got so much to learn about life, Dickie," he said. We walked back to Les Orangers in the soft afternoon light.

When I got back to London I was surprised to find how little it had changed. I had expected to see it through new eyes. But the tangle of gray streets, the squares, and the parks still remained the familiar landscape of my childhood. As I looked out of the windows of the taxi between the station and Castlereagh Gardens it dawned on me that despite Ermine I had still a long way to go. But all the same I looked forward to meeting my mother again on something more like equal terms.

She was not at the apartment. It was a matinee day and she was down at the theatre. When I had unpacked my bags I mooned round the quiet rooms looking at myself in my French sports clothes in the familiar mirrors, clinging to the fact that I had changed if nothing else had.

And then it struck me that it would be more in line with my newly discovered manhood if I went down to the theatre to take her unawares. It would be a good thing to show her that I had some initiative, and that there would be no more shunting me off as I had been for Christmas.

She was on stage in her big scene at the end of the last act of Larry Brook's Frost in May when I came onto the wings. She was well forward at center stage under a pale blue spot, standing with her face turned up towards the back row of the dress circle, giving an unbearably poignant expression of the grief of a young woman who had given up all hope of her own happiness for the sake of that of the man she loved. Perhaps because she knew that the thing was a rather shabby piece of theatrical trickery she was taking special care that the trick should not fail. I watched her with a crawling sensation on the back of my neck, feeling the immense will power with which she was creating the illusion of grief and conveying it to over a thousand people, and feeling, too, the irresistible pull of her animal vitality and beauty. I would have given anything in the

world to have her turn towards me, see me, and smile, when the curtain dropped, but I knew that would not happen. They, the ranks of anonymous people out front, were the ones she lived for.

Perhaps it was because I was already sick with jealousy that I took an instinctive dislike to the man who was standing close to me in the wings watching my mother. I could see at once that he did not belong in the theatre. He was staring at her with an appreciative smile which irritated me, and I found that I kept glancing at him. He looked round and caught me with my eyes on him, and after a second of interrogation, flashed his teeth at me.

"You're Richard, aren't you—you couldn't be anyone else with those eyes," he whispered.

I looked at him angrily with an adolescent sense of outrage at such a personal remark.

"It's all right," he said, amused by my reaction, which he had immediately understood, "I'm Colonel Arthur." He gave me his hand. "I'm glad to know you at last. I've heard a lot about you."

We shook hands and were both startled because the action was saluted by a roar of applause from the front of the house, and turning we saw the curtain falling. As soon as its heavy tasseled foot was below the level of her face my mother smiled into the wings at the Colonel. She did not see me for a moment, and while it lasted I had time to remember why his name was familiar to me. I had unexpectedly had a letter from her in the middle of the previous school term which had said, among other irrelevancies to which I could attach no importance, "I've just met Colonel Arthur-he's been a sort of Lawrence of Arabia among the tribesmen in the Himalayas for the last few years. He's a wonderful man, and I think we're going to be great friends." Now, as they glowed at each other, I understood the significance of the phrase, and saw the way the wind was blowing. I had been pushed off to Les Orangers to leave the coast clear for courtship.

My suspicion became a certainty when she came off stage all softness and tenderness and kissed me with her hands on my shoulders in a way which suggested a womanly pride and devotion to her great big boy. As she did it her eyes traveled swiftly over me, from the square padded shoulders of the atrocious jacket down to the thick-soled brogues, and I could feel the effort she made not to say anything about them, clearly it was important that nothing should mar this scene of affection.

"Mother, darling," I said.

"Dickie lamb, it's lovely to have you back." She blushed faintly, "I want you to meet Colonel Arthur."

"Oh, Dick and I are old friends, Naomi," said the Colonel. "We introduced ourselves while you were still 'on.' We've been getting along famously."

"I'm so glad. . . ."

It was dark when we got back to the apartment. While we waited for Stoneham to bring tea the Colonel began talking about India, and I had my first really good look at him. He was a very handsome man, tall and fair with the rather German appearance of the British upper class, and the characteristic tight upper lip. Everything about him spoke of money, from his well bathed, well trimmed, well manicured person down to the last detail of his dress.

I stole a look at my mother, and her eye met mine with a steely glint. She asked me how it had been at Max's. She hoped I hadn't been bored. I said that I'd had a very good time.

"I've never understood the appeal of that part of the world," said the Colonel, "the climbing's no good, there's no game to speak of, and the riding's impossible. What's there for a boy like you to do with himself all day? Just you wait till you get down onto my place in Wiltshire. Partridge, pheasant, wild duck in the water meadows—a nice bit of sporting water with some very game trout in it, and miles of open downland without a strand of barbed wire. You'll love it."

I said I didn't know much about guns, and I'd never ridden a horse.

"Well, let me tell you, learning to do that sort of thing is half the fun." He rose to his feet twinkling kindly. "I'd better be running along. I'm sure you two will have a lot to talk over after spending Christmas apart."

My mother saw him out. They whispered together in the hall for a long time, and I moved my position on the sofa so that I could watch them through the partly open door in a looking glass. My mother turned up her face and he kissed her with a certain solemnity. Lord above, I thought, what a stepfather. The front door shut, and my mother came back into the room a little defiantly.

"Who on earth is that? . . ." I said.

"A wonderful man you should be proud to know," she snapped, "and if we're going to ask questions I'd like to know how you got hold of those appalling clothes. That jacket's the most frightful thing I've ever seen, and the shoes are a disgrace. I'm not going to have you looking like a French waiter on his day off. You're to go to Poole's tomorrow morning to be fitted for a respectable tweed jacket, and a good dark suit."

"Now steady on, Mother, you know what you give me for a clothes allowance, and you ought to know if anyone does that it only just covers the regulation school stuff. I can't go barging into Poole's . . ."

"Don't be absurd—Jack—Colonel Arthur—has an account there and he's going to tell them to look after you. And you're to go to Maxwell's to get yourself some presentable shoes. . . ."

"Shoes, too . . . from him?" I thought of him measuring up my clothes, and my shoes, and deciding that I was not fit to be seen with him in public, and I suppose the thought put something source than I intended into the remark. My mother flared up.

"Don't be an ungrateful little monster—I thought it was very sweet of him to think of it. He's an angel."

"I'm sorry, Mother, it just rubbed me up the wrong way, the idea of you two whispering about my clothes and making plans for me as if I was a baby or an idiot."

"If you don't want to be treated like a baby don't behave like one. You're too old to sulk."

"I'll try not to. . . ." I felt a swift return of confidence. She was using the old way of making me feel small and it wouldn't do any longer. I was, after all, a man who had a mistress in France, and she just didn't know the first thing about the new being she had to deal with. "When are you and the angel getting married?"

She surveyed me with surprise.

"I didn't think you'd take it like this—I was going to lead up to it, and break it to you gently when you'd seen a little more of Jack. He really is an angel. He's kindness itself. I'm sure you'll like him when you know him."

"I'm sure I will, and I hope you're very happy together."

"You really don't mind, Dickie lamb? Because I do love him most terribly, and I just can't do anything else." She said it in her bright party voice, the one belonging to the nice girl having a wonderful time. The word love made me look into her eyes, and I saw that Naomi was sizing me up from within the loving ingenue. It was a moment of recognition, and when she turned away to stare into the bright coal fire in the grate she spoke to me without pretense of any kind. "My contract with Kenning and Archer runs out at the end of the month, and I'm not going to renew it. I'm not going to act any more. We're going to live down on Jack's place in Wiltshire."

A coal slid in the fire, which flared up in a wavering red flame. She stared through it, wrapt in a new dream, and the firelight danced on her remote, entranced, face. I was stunned. Castlereagh Gardens was the one fixed point in my life, and I suddenly saw it vanishing. And the stage was the one place where Naomi seemed to have a solid existence. Now even that was about to disappear. Everything was breaking up and dissolving.

The marriage took place in the middle of the school term, soon after *Frost in May* closed, and I didn't go to it. I saw some photographs of my mother arriving at the church in a cloud of

white lace, and leaving it on the Colonel's arm, smiling through a shower of rice and confetti, but even though they sent me a slice of wedding cake in a neat little cardboard box, I didn't really believe it had happened. I was only convinced that it had when I found myself at Marshwood when the holidays came round.

The taxi from Salisbury turned off the public road just outside Chilmark down a long avenue of beech trees. At the end of a half mile we crunched round a sharp curve and came in sight of the house. It looked enormous, and the front door was a good ten feet high under the Greek revival portico. When I had paid off the taximan I stood on the steps in front of the huge door and looked round, at the chapel in the same Greek style as the house standing not far off in the middle of a group of Lebanon cedars, at a stable behind a shrubbery, crowned with a white belfry, and at the hint of a walled garden and greenhouses behind a bank of beeches. I turned from all this magnificence and rang an old-fashioned bell.

Manson, the butler let me in.

"You'll find your coat in the little cloakroom under the staircase to the left when you want it again, sir," he said. "I trust you had a pleasant journey."

"Oh yes, thank you, very comfortable."

"I'll show you to your room, sir. Your mother wished me to say, sir, that she and the Colonel were lunching over at Wilton, and that they would return in time for tea."

"Oh, I see," I said.

We walked up the wide stone stairs and down a corridor lined with the heads of horned beasts and snarling cats mounted on shields with little gold labels saying where they had been shot. I was shown into a room rather larger than our old drawing room at Castlereagh Gardens flooded with warm afternoon sunshine. Everything in it looked very solid and very comfortable.

When I had spent some time at the windows taking in the vastness of the smooth green lawn I went down to explore. There was a great deal to look at in room after room filled with

precious things, but everything seemed stiff and uneasy. In the end I settled in the pink and white drawing room. Through the open French window leading out into a formal rose garden I could hear the rooks talking in the trees. It was a Wednesday: the matinee crowds would soon be coming out in London. The pavements would be crowded with people hurrying home, and in an hour or so that throng would give way to another making its way to restaurants and theatres, concert halls and cinemas. How could Naomi give up all that, for this? The room behind me suddenly became filled with a friendly roar.

"Hallo there, Richard my boy! Here he is, Emily . . . my dear fellow." He pumped my hand and patted my shoulder. "It's good to welcome you home, Richard." He was immensely genial, the room was filled with the warmth of his smile, and his loud hearty voice. "I wish we'd been here to meet you, old chap, but the Davincourts asked us to lunch, and Emily accepted without remembering what an important day it was. When we remembered it was too late to put them off. I could have kicked myself when I realized what had happened, but there these things happen—and as I said to Emily, 'Richard's not a baby any more, he'll have as much fun explorin' the house by himself as he would if we were showin' him round, I know he won't mind. . . . "

He stood there smiling at me in his big tweed overcoat, but I could see that he really was concerned. He'd come straight from the car without stopping to take his coat off, so that he wouldn't lose a minute before delivering his explanation of what had happened. When I had made it clear that I didn't mind a bit he patted my shoulder again, and this time it was with a real friendliness that surprised me. When my mother came into the room he looked down at himself in mock astonishment.

"Good Lord, here I am in the drawin' room in my topcoat—I'll just hang it up and wash my hands before tea." I knew from the way he said it that he'd be gone some time, and now I wondered if he'd kept his coat on in the first place in order to contrive a way of leaving us alone together.

We faced each other. I decided not to ask why the Colonel had taken to calling her by the name she had dropped when she first went on the stage. I saw at a glance that she had assumed a new personality for which Emily was the best possible name. She was wearing a tweed coat and skirt, a pale pearl-gray blouse, and flat-heeled brogues. There was a trace of lipstick on her mouth, but hardly any make-up on her face. We evaded everything there was between us with a silent kiss, and then went and sat side by side on the sofa.

"You're looking very well, dear, did you have a good term?" "Oh, pretty good."

"I hope the wedding cake we sent you was a success?"

"Yes, it was a great success."

"You might have written to say thank you. It was Jack's idea, and I think he was hurt that you didn't write."

"I'm sorry, but you were off on your honeymoon, and I didn't know where you were."

"You could have written here. Things like that are so easy to do, and they're so noticeable if you don't do them."

It was like so many of our dull conversations, my mistakes being niggled over.

"You needn't look so upset—I'm not really angry—it's just that I do love it when you do the graceful nice thing without being prompted. . . . I don't like nagging at you. I just can't bear it when you aren't absolutely perfect. . . . Manson will bring tea in a minute. I expect you're hungry after your journey."

She was nervous and ill at ease, and she kept looking at me, and then round the room, at the banks of flowers, the pinkness and the whiteness, as if she was trying to see it through my eyes.

"This is a lovely room, isn't it . . . and oh, Dickie lamb, even if you do hate it all pretend not to for my sake. Say you like it, Jack loves it more than anything in the world, and he does so want you to like it. . . ."

"It's the most wonderful place I've ever been in," I said.

"That's true enough," she said, and the old Naomi looked at

me piercingly out of the new plain country face for an instant, until the Colonel came beaming into the room.

"No tea yet, dear? If Richard's got half my appetite he could eat a horse. I'll tell you a funny thing about Marshwood, my boy, there's something in the air that makes you eat. Now when I'm abroad, or in town, I eat like a bird—I just don't seem to want big meals. But here, why, I'm always eating . . ."

I couldn't quite believe him as I listened to the steady flow of his cheerfulness pouring out relentlessly. Larry Brook and Naomi might have invented him jointly in the old days and kept him going as a running joke. It was incredible that she should have put the rest of her life into the hands of a joke come true.

The next morning we went rook shooting.

"Talbert down at the home farm says the rookeries are overcrowded," said the Colonel. "There are about two thousand too many of the black villains on the place. It's not exciting shooting, but you'll get a good chance to get the feel of a twelve bore."

We went off to the rookery followed by two keepers soon after breakfast. The air had the wonderful freshness of a spring morning after a night of rain, and the green of the new leaves on the trees was as bright as blossom.

"Rain before seven, fine by eleven," said the Colonel, snuffing the soft breeze with his head thrown back. "We're going to have a good day."

As we came in sight of the clumps of beeches where the rooks nested, the thousands of black birds rose clamoring in protest at the sight of the glint on our gun barrels. They circled cawing for twenty minutes out of range while we took our positions under their trees.

"Take them as they drop onto the nests," said the Colonel, "when they spread their wings wide to slow themselves up—you've got the best target then."

I remembered what I had been told: Don't think about aiming, swing on the bird, and when you feel it at the end of the

gun, fire. Don't think, follow your instinct. The birds began to drop. I looked across to see if the Colonel had observed my triumph. He gave me the thumbs-up sign.

We ate a picnic lunch on the edge of the wood and shot on through the afternoon. When we got back to the house I was ready for an enormous tea, a bath, an enormous dinner, and bed. I was in the Marshwood swing.

When we were not shooting we were riding, and the Colonel and I spent many hours hacking along the grass tracks that criss-crossed the bare, empty expanses of downland. We would ride for miles, hour after hour, without meeting more than three or four people, and only seeing cars when we came down from the crests into the broader valleys to cross over from one ridge to another. The Colonel loved these forgotten sheep walks and cattle droves, and the wide emptiness they passed through, with its old prehistoric hill forts melting into the grassland, its fading traces of Roman roads and camps. We used to ride off in the early morning and get back late in the evening, often too late for tea, take baths, eat dinner half asleep, and go straight to bed. I scarcely read a book all the holidays, and I forgot that I was missing a dozen new plays and films.

I was enjoying myself, but there was more to it than that. I had a strange feeling that I was in my own country. Once or twice we passed along an old sheep walk that ran along the crest of the downs above Plummer's Dene, and as I looked down at its two or three farms, and its cluster of cottages nestling round the square-towered church, I felt a movement of the heart.

The horses were walking, tired by the long climb up the side of the down, and the sense of familiarity was so strong that I reined in my animal and stopped. The Colonel stopped beside me, and we looked down at the gray church and the thatched houses together.

"It's queer," I said, "I've never been here before, I'm sure of that, but ever since I've been in this part of the world I've had the oddest feeling—as if I'd come back—as if it was home."

"I'm glad you feel that, Richard. I've been wanting to say this to you for some time. It is your home. I want you to think of it that way, always." The Colonel turned in his saddle and smiled into my eyes. "I want you to think of me . . . well, as if Emily and I had met each other when we should have if this had been the best of all possible worlds—a long way back—as if we'd all three been together from the first. I want you to feel about Marshwood just as I did, when I was a boy. It was where my father and mother lived. It was home. It was where I belonged."

I was taken aback. If as he put it "we'd all three been together from the first" he would have been my father. Every bone in my body, every muscle, every corpuscle in my blood, recoiled from the idea. Max was my father. I looked in the Colonel's eyes and saw nothing but kindness there, and the instinctive revulsion died. I remembered how little of a home Castlereagh Gardens really had been, and I remembered sitting looking across the harbor at Cannes, thinking that all places were alike to me, the dwelling places of strangers.

The last few days of the holidays went by very quickly, and I was sorry when they were gone. While they lasted we were all very close together. The Colonel felt easier in his mind about our situation, and his flow of talk became funnier and less boring. My mother saw that we were getting on well, and the tension and strain of our first encounter in the pink and white room vanished.

Step by step I was being taken over by Marshwood. Although it was high summer the Colonel was already looking ahead. He planted several mentions of the Christmas rituals of the place in his talk, and though he described the annual ball, the party for the tenants' children, and the trip to Salisbury for the choir school carols in the past tense, he managed to suggest that soon I would be enjoying these things at Christmas, and that I would not be with Max in France.

My mother didn't concern herself with hints and intimations. But our common experience was going into the discard implacably. I could refer to things we had done together or seen together without producing anything more than a vague, "Did we? Do you know, I've quite forgotten. . . ." or, "Did we, Dickie lamb? I'm sure I'd remember a thing like that—perhaps you dreamed it. . . ." As for the stage and anything to do with it, a curtain had fallen on all that.

On the morning of my birthday, the Colonel and I went for a walk after breakfast. We climbed up the rounded side of Chilmark Down. When we came out onto the crest we could see the whole of Marshwood's park and the smiling valley which spread away from it to the south, a patchwork of well kept farms beautifully supervised by the estate office. The Colonel lifted his stick and showed me where the boundaries ran.

"It's better than looking at it on a map," he said. "What I like to think of is the way that Marshwood goes on—there are hundreds of years behind it. We've loved it and cared for it for generations. And it makes me happy to know it'll be loved and cared for after I'm gone."

I didn't say anything. Both the Colonel's brothers had been killed in World War I. His only uncle had died, childless, in the early twenties.

"Responsibility is a funny thing," said the Colonel. "Sometimes it takes you unawares, and you get knocked off balance by it. If it comes as a shock it's liable to come as a burden. Marshwood isn't just a place to live in comfortably, it's a going concern. It's the livelihood of a good many people. You'd be surprised to know how much there is to learn about land, and timber, and buildings, before you know how to handle an estate. When I came into the place I was ready to take it on—I was used to the idea. I want you to be used to the idea. You see, I want you to carry on here after I'm gone. I don't want you to think you're just spending a little time here while you grow up because your mother happens to be my wife. It's all been arranged with the lawyers now, you're my son and heir, and when I die you'll have Marshwood. I hope you'll think about that when you make decisions in the next few years. It means a lot to me, and I hope it will mean as much to you."

"But, sir . . ." only one thought came into my head, "have you told Mother about this? . . ."

"Not yet, I wanted it to be a surprise for your birthday. I wanted to make it a big day for you both. I know it'll make her happy. She worries about you a lot."

I looked at the Colonel. I had often tried to put myself in his place. If I had married a woman for all the reasons that make one particular woman attractive beyond all the others I would have found it very easy to dislike her son, if he had been jealous, attached to a brilliant father, and to a literary world with which I had no sympathy, and above all to the world of the theatre from which I had detached his mother. In his place I would have been eager to hurry the son along so that he could get out into the world of his choice and away. But the Colonel was larger than that. As time had run on I had come to despise some things about him more and more: his dead insensitivity to poetry, painting, and the arts, to the things that counted more than anything else to me. And at times I almost hated him for his lack of quickness, and wit. But all these shortcomings were trivial irritations when they were set off against the integrity of his love. It did not matter that my mother was playing a part for him, and making a fool of him by pretending to be something she was not for twenty-four hours in the day. By some instinct he had seen through her pretenses and seen that her dream world needed a guardian. It was nothing to him that he might look like a fool as long as she was happy.

As I fumbled for the right words with which to thank him for his splendid gesture, he rose to the occasion in his own way.

"You don't have to thank me, Richard. There's nothing to say. We're only recognizing the facts of the situation. All you can do for me is to be ready when my time comes, and see there's someone ready when your time comes."

"I'll do my level best. I only hope I'm good enough." My eyes were misty with tears. I wanted to warn him against what might happen but I didn't know how.

When I was back at school Max suddenly ended the eight months' silence that he had preserved since I had last seen him with a spate of letters telling me of new departures in his plans for living. The first arrived a day or two before my birthday in October, with a check for fifteen pounds.

"You might buy a typewriter with it—if poets like using such things—but I daresay it will meet some other more pressing need such as Egyptian cigarettes or surrealist magazines. Anyway here it is, and have a good birthday.

"I've been thinking about you a lot lately. I've got plans. It's ridiculous that you should have two half-brothers you've never met—we're a scattered family, and it's time we all got together. Fred and John are two very good fellows, and as they are your brothers you ought to get to know them. Fred's wife Amabel has two nice little beasts of children who are fun to play with, and John's Maeve is a great dear. We'll all get together in London over the holidays, and I'm sure we'll have a very good time. John has picked out a very jolly little house for me in St. John's Wood and I'm quite looking forward to having an English home again.

"Lolotte sends you her love. She's threatening to leave for Arabia or the High Atlas rather than face a winter in England, but I think I can persuade her to come. . . ."

There were two or three more letters introducing me to the family with an easy run of gossip, and by the time the holidays came round I had quite a clear picture in my head of the brothers and their wives that I had never seen. I imagined the house as white and light, and full of gay colors, and peopled it with younger editions of Max, quick, amusing and full of ideas that rapidly expanded into jokes and flashed off into new ideas. Amabel and Maeve would be like Naomi and Lolotte.

Presently the letters told me that I was to spend Christmas

with Max in London, and threw me into a state of feverish excitement. Perhaps Lolotte would come too, and bring Ermine with her. I couldn't really believe, in spite of all the time that had gone by, that I had lost her. I wrote to her, begging her to try to come.

"You don't need, now, to marry some wretched soldier. I'm heir to seven thousand glorious acres of Wiltshire farmland, with the nicest house you've ever seen in a park in the middle of it all. If you can wait a year or two we can get married. And, oh, Ermine, I do wish you would because there never was and never will be anyone quite like you. . . ."

Max's new house in London was something of a surprise. It was a gothic villa in a row of discreetly varied stucco houses that radiated suburban decency. I walked up the front steps and rang, hoping I'd find Lolotte inside, in what I had in mind as a Maxish interior, alive with paintings, bright colors, and amusing things. But when the pleasant-faced little cockney maid, in a neat cap and apron, had let me in I felt for a while that I must have made some mistake about the address.

Everything was in such very good safe taste. In the drawing room there were bookshelves, not the open reader's bookshelves that I associated with Max, but glass-fronted affairs inside which the books were held prisoners. Over the fireplace there was a portrait of an intensely serious young man, looking eager, a little overweight, and entirely humorless. I studied it for a while before I realized that it was supposed to be Max. The painter had missed everything he was, and had made him dully good-looking. I went up to it and tried to find a signature, wondering who was responsible for this grotesque misrepresentation. And just as I discovered the squiggle of the creator my father came into the room behind me. I looked over my shoulder, and there he was, compact and buoyant, watching me with a twinkle in his eye.

He came over, patted my shoulder, gave me a little pecking kiss on the cheek, and then jerked his head up at the canvas.

"You'd never know it was me, would you?" he said and grinned. "As a matter of fact it isn't—it's a portrait of two chaps who died. It's very sad because they were both full of promise, both of them. One was Max Town the serious writer—he would have been a sort of British Dostoevski—he would have written, oh, tremendous novels about people being perfectly miserable in the industrial north. The beginning of one of his novels still sticks around, I stole it, and made it into a pretty good short story. That Max was furious. He haunted me for a long time. He'd crop up at two or three in the morning when I was overworking and not sleeping. He'd point his long white finger at me and say, 'Why are you always joking, Max, how dare you have so much fun? Don't you know the world is a fearfully gloomy place . . . you aren't depressing enough. You'll never be a great writer.' Then he'd vanish."

"And what about the other one, would he have been a writer too?"

"Oh, no. He was a revolutionary, red-hot stuff, all for barricades, speeches from the town hall steps, and so forth. A sort of wilder Lenin, with a whiff of Lamartine about him. He was at his best talking to cheering mobs . . . he had a dead-white face and fiery eyes. He'd really have turned England upside down if he'd lived. . . ."

"He must have been hard to finish off, with all that fervor in him."

"Well, he wasn't. . . . He was about eighteen inches too short, you see, and then he put on weight too quickly. When you got a good look at him in daylight he looked like a jolly little man. And then there was something about his voice. When he tried to reach the people at the back of the hall, and where he got excited, his voice went up two tones—to tell the bitter truth, he squeaked. When he tried to sway the mob the mob said things like "louder" and "speak up" and "carn't 'ear a word, mister." He died without much of a struggle, poor fellow."

"Does he ever do any haunting?"

"He did for a bit-until I saw the countries where people

like him had had a free hand—it was all mess and misery. If he'd succeeded, portraits like that damned thing would have cropped up in public buildings and schoolrooms—to conceal the fact that he was just an impatient fool who smashed up a lot of things and people because he didn't have the sense and the patience to make people see reason. All he promised was a lot of trouble and a big name in the history books—I'm glad he died."

"Then why do you have him hanging up there?"

"To tell the truth, Richard, it's to please Amabel. She wants me to be respectable. She thinks that chap is much more likely to get given the Order of Merit or a Knighthood than I am, and she hangs him up there as an example to me. She doesn't know it's really a warning."

"What's Amabel like?" I said.

"Oh, don't you worry . . . you'll get on with Amabel all right," he said.

Unfortunately it wasn't so. Amabel was Scotch, and she had the Scots look of good health and a consciousness of superior virtue. When she came into the room she smiled as if she was doing me a favor against her better judgment. I took an instant dislike to her, and I knew, instinctively, that there was no question for her of either liking or disliking me: she knew the facts of my origin and therefore disapproved of me.

I met them all over drinks before dinner that evening. It was an awkward hour for all of us except Max, who had such a firm conviction that we ought to get on well that it never occurred to him that we might not. My half-brothers and I had eighteen years of unshared life between us, I was under twenty and they were married men ten years older. It was quite simply too late in the day for us to be suddenly presented with the obligation of being fond and affectionate. It was heavy going, even though it was Christmas Eve.

I don't remember what we found to talk about, but suddenly Fred got to his feet.

"Look here, if we're going to get these Christmas decorations

up we'd better get busy-I don't know about you others, but we've got to be home for dinner at eight."

Amabel produced a step ladder. John and his wife Maeve, who was a soft honey-colored girl with friendly eyes, brought in armfuls of holly, laurel and fir that they had brought up from the country, and within a few minutes we were scattered through the downstairs rooms. In the middle of it all, after a certain amount of whispering with John, Fred beckoned to me, and led me out of the room. We slipped away through the momentarily empty hall, and out at the front door.

Fred took my arm as he led me down the front steps. "This is a great occasion," he said, "you're taking part in an old family ritual, fetching in the tree-it's down here at the side of the house. We started it years ago, when John and I were kids. Max decided we were too old for Christmas trees any more. John and I found out, at the last minute, and we went and got a tree on our own. We brought it into the house, and dragged out the ornaments and set it up all on our own. Max laughed at us, but he really liked it. So every year after that Max staged a mock rebellion against the Christmas things and we forced it on him, it became a sort of game to see how elaborate we could be in spite of him. It got to be pretty good fun. So now whenever the family is together at Christmas we stage the surprise, and bring in the tree just before dinner on Christmas Eve. It's all very silly, but it's rather nice too, and I hope you'll be in on it from now on."

The tree was firmly anchored in a big copper cauldron with two handles, and we carried it in between us. As we came back into the drawing room everyone gathered round, exclaiming, "My word, it's a beauty, it must be the tallest ever. . . ." Maeve brought the boxes of ornaments out of a cupboard, and for a few minutes she and Fred and John were busy taking the treasures of their childhood out of their tissue-paper wrappings and wiring them to the branches. John uncoiled some wiring, and soon a silver star was glowing quietly at the head of the tree. O AGRICULTURAL

We all stood back a few feet, and looked up at the gleaming pyramid of silver, red and gold.

"I think it's the loveliest ever," said Maeve, quietly.

Max came up between Fred and me and put his arms over our shoulders. John looked up at the silver star. It was a shock to meet Amabel's cold hostile glare. Out of the corner of my eye I saw Fred frown and shake his head at her, and then her glare was replaced by a forced smile but not at me.

John looked quickly at his wrist watch. "Good grief, Maeve," he said, "it's ten to eight. If we don't get moving directly the Fenwicks will be wanting to murder us for ruining their dinner."

In a few minutes Max and I were alone among the greenery and the empty glasses. He turned out all the lights except a table lamp by the tree.

"They're not a bad lot," he said. "It's a good thing for a man to have a family behind him. It's all very well, this being on your own, and being independent, that people of your age want so badly, but you want to belong somewhere, and you need something more than friendship to rely on when troubles come, you know. Fred and John are good fellows when you get to know them. I hope you'll get on."

"I got on with Fred," I said. "I found John a little difficult, though. . . ."

"Yes, I thought you would. John's Gwen's boy, he looks like her, and he thinks like her. Fred's more like me. . . ."

He paused and looked at me with an unfamiliar expression of self-doubt on his face.

"At first I thought I knew all about Gwen, when we were first married. I thought she knew all about me. And then I found there were all sorts of things I'd never told her and couldn't tell her, because I should have told her about them right away." He sketched a circle in the air with his hand. "There was that little secret enclosure inside me that she'd never entered. And then I found she had one too. She had a delicate, sensitive side to her that I was too coarse for, and that she kept from me. I respected her secret life, and she respected mine, and

we never spoke about it, ever. In the end we had taken what was really important to us both in the relationship and screened it off. I started looking for the complete understanding I wanted from other women, in a lot of little affairs; and she took refuge in a dream world in which I had less and less part. Children see much more than they're supposed to. John somehow knew all about that dream world of Gwen's and tried to make himself part of it. It's made him, well, complicated . . . you'll find him pretty easy to get on with, but hard to get to know."

He turned from me and stared for a moment at the portrait of himself as he altogether wasn't.

His expression changed. "Now let's go out and have some fun."

We went and had dinner at Scott's Lobster House. When we'd eaten we strolled for a time among the theatres and the movie houses looking for a show that might be worth dropping in on. We took in the second act of a disappointing farce, and presently walked homewards.

I was deep in a dream of Ermine. Somehow I had to see her again, and soon. She was the only thing in life. It became an effort to give Max any attention at all, he was a stranger who hardly knew me. I realized that I had missed what he had been saying for more than a hundred yards. His monologue was flowing on, imperturbably, along its own channel.

"Lolotte is very fond of you. She's been worrying me about you. I'd forgotten how defenseless and dependent one is at your age. She reminded me of it and made me see it. I've settled some money on you. It's a sort of Christmas present—it sounds like a lot, but it isn't really very much, just enough on a reasonable calculation. You won't ever have to worry about bread and butter and a bed for the rest of your life. The jam, and the champagne, and the clean sheets will be up to you. It's a trust fund, you won't be able to touch the capital till you're thirty, but you'll get a steady seven hundred and fifty a year or so. It's solid ground under your feet, so you can pick what career you want, and if you pick wrong you'll be able to pull out and make

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a fresh start. Lolotte's got the idea that you might turn into a sort of hanger-on of that fellow of Naomi's if you're dependent on his good will for everything—it was stupid of me not to think of it before—but now you're independent, and you'll be able to work out your own line."

"That's magnificent of you, Max, I'm bowled over. But you shouldn't have worried. Naomi's Colonel has been very good to me about money—there isn't any kind of pressure on me so far as he's concerned—in fact the reverse. I've never had to ask him for money, and the other day he told me he was making me his heir—when he dies I'll come into Marshwood and all the farms—he's really been awfully decent. . . ."

There was a moment of silence, and then Max laughed.

"I wish I'd known that. . . . What sort of a place is Marshwood?"

"It's a beautiful place, everything's perfect, the way the beech woods lie in the folds of the hills, and the house seems to grow out of the ground. It has about seven thousand acres, and it's all good land."

"And I suppose there's plenty of money to keep it all up . . . and you'll come into that, too."

"Jack, Colonel Arthur says so. He wants me to learn about farming and estate management so that I'll know how to run the place properly."

"And you like the idea?"

"I love Marshwood—it's really a wonderful place."

"And what about those plays you were going to write, eh," he was smiling sourly, "do you still mean to write them?"

"Yes, of course." Something in his voice was a challenge to me. "They're more important than anything."

"I wonder if you'll find them very easy to write in a country drawing room . . . still, estate management isn't such very demanding work, and the plays may come."

We walked on again without speaking, and turned in at the end of our street. When we were nearly at the foot of his front steps he spoke again as he reached in his waistcoat pocket for his doorkey.

"I don't really know what makes a man write. I began for the odd guinea—it was just after I'd left college and married Gwen. I was making what was supposed to be a living teaching a class of young louts of fifteen in a secondary school and the odd guinea was a powerful factor in our affairs. I discovered that the cheap weekly papers bought sketches-little fifteen-hundred-word vignettes on anything-so I began turning everything we did into guineas-if Gwen burned the joint when her mother came to dinner, if we took a walk in the park on Saturday afternoon and hired a skiff, if it came on to rain on a day when I'd gone to work without an umbrella I'd turn it into a sketch, about ovens and mothers-in-law, about cockney vachtsmen, about . . . anything. I doubled my salary, and soon I was making more at writing than teaching . . . and then I found I didn't have to wait for an incident to write about-I could invent one—and after that I found I had something to say, and I gave up teaching so as to get it said. I have an idea a drawing room is a harder place to get out of than a schoolroom . . . but there's always the example of dear Henry James, and I suppose I may as well wish you luck."

There was a chill in his manner, and for a moment I felt a stranger to him. The front door swung open, and we walked into the lighted hallway. We stood for a moment looking at each other, dazzled. The coldness in his voice was in his face too, he surveyed me as if he had not really seen me before.

"It gives me an odd feeling to think that a son of mine is going to be a country gentleman, it's the last thing I would have expected." He laughed shortly. "Well, it can't be helped—I suppose I ought to be glad for you. Let's have a nightcap before we turn in."

There was a mink coat lying on a chest against the wall behind him, and while he was speaking I caught sight of it. It had been thrown down as Lolotte would throw down a coat. My heart leapt—perhaps Lolotte was sitting in the drawing room waiting for us—she would have news of Ermine. . . . I ran into the room.

The one lamp beside the Christmas tree was still burning,

and a woman was sitting outside its pool of light beside the dying fire. She turned her head slowly, smiling across the shadowed room, as I came in, and then her smile vanished.

"Who are you? . . ." she said, standing up.

"I'm sorry, I'm Richard Savage, I didn't expect . . ."

"Let's have some more light," said Max, coming in behind me and snapping the switches. He took in the situation and his voice rose in pitch. "Oh, damn it, Alice, what confounded foolery is this? . . ."

"I just terribly couldn't bear not seeing you tonight, Max," she said. "Don't be cross, please."

"You shouldn't have come. You had absolutely no right . . . oh, damn and blast, and blast again. . . ."

Max stamped, and shook his head with exasperation. Alice tucked her lower lip under her teeth and for a moment looked like a guilty child. Her face was a delicate oval above a slender neck. She looked at me and smiled gently, appealingly.

"I'm sleepy, Max," I said. "I think I'll forget about that night-cap, and get off to bed. Good night."

"Yes, you'd better get along." Max glowered at me under his eyebrows, and then smiled. "You'll meet Alice another time. She's the nicest creature and the biggest damn fool in the world. We'll pretend this meeting never happened—good night, old man."

As the door shut behind me I heard him saying, "Now, look here, Alice . . ." But his voice was no longer shrill with fury.

I fell asleep and dreamed of Marshwood. The house was empty and sunlit, filled with an early-morning lightness. I heard Ermine talking, and laughing her bubbling secret lover's laugh close by, but though I went from room to room I couldn't find her. I woke in an agony of grief and despair and found myself alone in a strange place. I lay for a moment or two wondering where I was, and then remembered that I was in my father's house.

Alice had vanished by morning, leaving no trace but an occasional conspiratorial gleam in Max's eye when it met mine, and Christmas passed off as a genial family affair. By the time lunch and tea were over and the party began to break up I had come to terms with my brothers to some extent. I had lunch with Fred at his club the following Wednesday, and spent that weekend with Maeve and John down at Datchford.

The atmosphere in the St. John's Wood house had changed during the weekend. Max had been away too, and he came back after I had settled in. He seemed surprised to find me there, and after a momentary flash of irritation became overwhelmingly agreeable. We had lunch together and he talked about politics, enlarging on a theory that the English and French politicians, with the help of American business, had made Hitler inevitable by what they had done in the twenties.

"Isn't he just a freak?" I said. "A sort of General Boulanger, only a little more successful. When the theatricals go on and the Germans find they're just as poor and as badly off as ever, they'll kick him out."

"He won't give them a chance. He'll pitch them into some idiotic war before they get the hang of him—just the way old Kaiser William's soldiers and Junkers pushed Germany into the World War because they couldn't face admitting they'd gone bankrupt. You'll see, when Hitler's run through the petty cash that's lying round he'll go to war too. Have you ever thought about it—what you'll do when war comes? It's going to be a bigger war than anything we've ever seen—there won't be any holding it tidily down on battlefields, it's going to spread out over everything. . . ." He launched out upon the changes that tanks and aircraft had made in warfare, and sketched what proved to be an accurate enough picture of what was coming.

The maid came in to clear the coffee things and the fruit plates away. Max's mood changed.

"I haven't been to a circus for years. I saw the posters the other day, and I got some tickets for tonight. Alice is coming along—it's time you met her properly. What do you say?"

He had become once again the friendly uncle arranging an outing for a child he didn't know very well.

We had a ringside box, and we had a very pleasant evening. Somebody to do with the circus recognized Max and tipped off the leading clown of that year, a tramp romeo who made a specialty of pleasing the cheap seats by paying embarrassing visits to boxholders. As he bore down on us I suffered a moment of the panic that had sometimes come upon me in the old days when I was out with Max and Lolotte, but this was Alice, and she handled the thing beautifully. When the clown after staring at her in a moonstruck fashion for some time suddenly opened his vest and released a large bright red heart on the end of a spring she blew him kisses with both hands. Everybody seemed to love it and laughed without malice. When he came to the edge of the box and went into his romeo routine she played up to him with cool good humor, and without any trace of embarrassment. While she was writing I love you on the heart with a white crayon he had given her, a flash lamp went off, and we discovered that a photographer had crept up on us. We all turned towards him, still smiling, Alice with one hand on the clown's shoulder and the other on his huge paper heart. The flash went off a second time in our faces.

"Damn," said Max furiously. "Oh . . ."

"Don't worry, my pet," said Alice, "you never see that kind of picture again, ever. I've had them do it to me hundreds of times in nightclubs and places, and nobody ever prints them."

While I was having breakfast the next morning the maid brought in the *Daily Sketch*, a paper which, taken for the kitchen, didn't usually appear above stairs.

"I thought you might like to see the paper," she said. "There's ever such a nice photo of you and Mrs. Carver and Mr. Town at the circus, on the center page."

There we were, Max, Alice, myself and the clown. We all

had happy faces, and Alice, leaning forward to write on the heart, looked extremely attractive.

"It's very nice, Rose," I said, "but I think you'd better put it away before Mr. Town sees it."

I thought it could be disposed of and forgotten as easily as that. I didn't realize that the photograph was being distributed by an agency that had subscribers in every country where Max's name was known, and I'd forgotten that he belonged to a press cutting agency. The whole thing slipped out of my mind as soon as Rose had closed the dining room door behind her.

I saw a good deal of Alice in the next couple of weeks. She would arrive at tea time and we would talk until Max came down from his study. She was honest, witty, and kind, and I grew fond of her very quickly. She was very much in love with Max, and it was pleasant to see the way she lit up with happiness when he was with her. He was as happy with her, and I benefitted by the overflow of good humor which she generated in him. Our teas were very good fun, and quite made up for the fact that I became an extra man round about six or seven. I would leave them then, and go out to have dinner with a school friend or with Fred at the club. When I found myself alone I would eat early at an oyster bar at the Café Royal and go to a theatre. The intoxication that came over me as I sat watching the seats fill up, the house lights going down, the footlights coming up, and the curtain rising, was better than any company. And in the mornings there were sheets of paper to be covered with more and more of my first seriously written play.

All in all I had a very good time until Amabel sought me out on one of her days. She came over from Fred's house in Belsize Park a couple of times a week in her capacity as house-keeper for Max. I generally managed to avoid her, but this time she came into my room and stood confronting me like Eugene Aram's conscience.

"I wonder how much longer you mean to stay, Richard," she said.

"I thought the plan was for me to stay on until after Max's birthday banquet, until the beginning of next month."

"Don't you think it might be wiser to cut your visit short?"
"Have I upset Max, or anything?"

Amabel tugged downwards at the hem of her tailor-made jacket, a curiously prudish gesture.

"No, it isn't that at all. I'd have thought you would have been well aware how ambiguous your position was—particularly now that Max is a little more in the public eye than usual."

"I don't think I understand."

"People talk, you know. I thought Max was very short-sighted, asking you to stay in the first place. And then when Mrs. Carver started coming here in and out of season, well, I've heard some very unpleasant things said . . . about that photograph that was in the papers the other day." She wrinkled up her face with an expression of disgust . . . "You're really old enough to realize that you shouldn't be seen about with your father and Mrs. Carver."

"I'm rather proud of Max, and I like Mrs. Carver. She's a very nice woman. What's wrong with being seen with her?"

"If you don't know I can't possibly tell you." She cast down her eyes and smiled. "When you're a little older, and you've had more experience of normal life, you'll understand why I think you'd best go home. I'm only advising you in your own interest."

She left me, poisoned with rage. I did no more work that morning and I was still angry when Alice came in at tea time.

"You're looking terrible cross today, Richard?"

"I had a spat with Amabel."

"Tell."

"There isn't anything, really, to tell. She just made me mad with that Scotch self-righteousness of hers. She's horrible."

"She's very proper. I expect it's a great strain for her, putting up with Max and his bad ways. You have to make allowances—people get panicky out of their depth."

Rose brought in the tea tray. I looked under the covered

dish to see if we had toasted tea cake or muffins, and Alice picked up the *Evening Standard* to see what the Low cartoon was.

"There was a letter for you in the afternoon post, Master Richard," said Rose.

I took it from her and recognized Naomi's handwriting, sprawling swiftly towards the edges of the envelope. When I opened it I saw the photograph from the *Daily Sketch* cut neatly from the page.

## "Dear Dickie,

I don't know what idiocy of Max's let you in for this but I can't help feeling that you're almost old enough to know better. I suppose I should have warned you that Alice Carver was hanging round Max, and I should have told you what a dangerous woman she is. Before she married poor Henning Carver -an angel of patience poor lamb-for his money-she was in a horrible scandal with Basil Twyning—the son not the father he left his wife for her three months before their second son was born. It was the cruelest shock for the poor girl, and a dreadful humiliation. When she'd got Basil to leave his wife she pretended she didn't want to have anything to do with him and ran away abroad and Twyning killed himself. Alice left Henning after they'd been married eight years—she just ran out on him when he was ill and left him alone in his house with no one to look after him but the servants—he nearly died. Poor Henning spent years trying to pay off the bills she'd run up. She was with some Greek for a year or two after that. It's just like Max to be taken in by a little harpy like Alice, and it doesn't surprise me in the least that she's wormed her way into his life. I really worry sometimes at the extraordinary mental deterioration that has overtaken him since that horrible Lolotte got hold of him. He's not the old Max at all, and I'm afraid for his mind. But what is too bad of him is to drag you about in public with a woman like that and I do warn you to be more careful. I know you won't be able to understand what harm a photograph like this can do, but it's these silly things that stick in people's minds

and make up a reputation. Jack saw the picture, and although he didn't say anything I think it hurt him terribly to see you exposing yourself to that kind of thing. I do hope it will make you realize how utterly reckless Max is. I should have put you on your guard, and I can kick myself for not doing so before this dreadful picture found its way into the papers, but I know how you feel about Max and I didn't want to spoil your illusions. But you're almost a man now and I must speak out before you get involved in some sordid scandal as I was. . . ."

I rolled the paper into a ball and threw it into the fire. It half uncurled as it burned, and for a moment it looked like a malevolent little face leering at me from the flames. I took the poker and knocked it into pieces.

"Something horrid?"

"Beastly, I don't know why people want to make so much beastliness. . . ."

"Oh, lovey, not everybody does. You just don't have to let the ones that do bother you, they don't matter, not really."

"You don't mind what people say about you?" I looked at her sitting so calmly opposite me, wondering if she would be as placid if she had known what was in Naomi's letter. "No matter what they say?"

"But lovey, if what they say isn't true it can't matter—and if it is true, well you've done it, and you have to live with it even if they don't talk about it. There's no getting round what you've done, you know." She looked at me with absolutely clear eyes. "We all do pretty frightful things sooner or later, even if we don't mean to . . . and sometimes things look awful that really aren't." Her eyes dropped and she studied the paper. "They say this new play at the Court is very good, have you seen it yet?"

"Not yet, I thought of going tonight."

"Isn't it terrible dull for you, going to plays and movies alone so much? You ought to have a girl."

"I'm not lonely."

"That's not what I meant, really. I mean you ought to be starting to make some life for yourself that hasn't anything to

do with Max or Naomi." She folded the paper. "You mustn't stick around getting hurt and ingrown. It's time you found something solid for yourself somewhere else."

"I've heard all that, before, thank you."

I picked up the paper she had put down and began to read it. I knew she was sitting watching me with undiminished friendliness. But I couldn't bear to accept her good will. When she spoke again I pretended not to be listening.

"Your father's a Victorian. He's out of another time. He learned everything he knows in another world. It's all irrelevant to yours. You've got to learn something quite different."

I thought I saw an opening, and a chance to hurt her.

"I don't see, then, why you bother."

"Oh, Richard, I'm a woman. I'm twice your age, perhaps a year or two more than that. And it's a fair exchange. I get something from him, and he gets something from me. I don't beg him to give me something readymade just in return for being his woman . . . you expect an awful lot just for being his son. And he doesn't know what you want—he can't know, because, poor pet, he knows all about things and nothing about people—that's why he goes from one woman to another. It isn't in him to be any more use to you."

"I don't believe you. He understands more about . . . oh, everything, than anyone else I've ever known. He . . ."

"But you can't, or at least you don't, ever tell him anything that's really important . . . like about being in love."

"Suppose I'm not in love . . ."

"Oh, my poor baby, it's with you night and day. I can't look at you without wishing I could do something for you that would make it all right. You're having a horrid time."

"What do you know about it? How do you know?"

"Max told me about Ermine, when we were talking about you one time. I'd said how odd you hadn't a girl friend when you were so warm and emotional. He said I had you all wrong, and that you weren't ready for that sort of thing. He told me about Lolotte's plot and how you hadn't the least idea what was going on. He told me about it as if it was funny, and how he'd

managed to prevent you from being seduced. I knew at once that that was it. . . ."

I told her all about Ermine, with my heart lifting as each word of it came out.

"There you are. That's the important thing. And you've never been able to say a word to him about it. You won't be able to now, or ever. It's your thing. He doesn't come into it. You're on your own. That's how it ought to be. You're all wrong to think he ought to come into it."

"I suppose I am."

She studied my face.

"Do you still love her, very much, in spite of her off-putting letters?"

"I don't believe the letters . . . she's something else. I know. . . ."

"Poor Richard, I hope you see her again soon."

"I've got to."

Alice smiled and turned to look into the firelight.

"Perhaps you will." She reached out and touched the fluted silver Georgian teapot. "The tea's nearly cold. Ring for Rose so that she can make some fresh before Max comes down."

"I don't think I'll wait any longer. I feel like a walk." I went over and pressed the bell. "You've given me a lot to think about."

"Promise not to be cross with Max. You mustn't blame him for being locked up in his things—it's not his fault. It's just the way he is. . . ."

A few days later the house was all bustle as Amabel and Miss Household fussed and telephoned, approving and revising the arrangements made by the organizers of Max's birthday banquet. Max was busy in his study hammering out an article commissioned by one of the daily papers, to be called "Sixty Years of Triumph—or Disaster?" The atmosphere was unfavorable for writing my kind of play, and after listening to the hurrying footsteps and the shrilling telephone for a time I took a long bus ride.

When I came back it was late afternoon and the light was going, fading into a greenish dusk. I turned into our street snuggling down inside my coat collar and almost ran into Rose.

"Whatever is the matter, Rose? . . ."

"Oh Master Richard, sir, we must find a policeman. . . ."
"A policeman?"

"Oh yes, sir, please . . . there's a foreign lady at the house —carrying on something awful . . . you wouldn't credit the things she's been shouting at Mr. Town and Mrs. Amabel . . . I was frightened someone would get hurt, and I slipped out for the police. . . ." Some of the confusion left Rose's face, and was replaced by a grin. "She's got Mrs. Amabel locked in the little closet under the hall stairs."

Lolotte! I thought.

"We'd better keep the police out of it, Rose, at any rate until everything else fails."

When we got to the house the front door was standing wide open and two small boys were standing at the foot of the steps peering into the hallway with wide eyes and open mouths. I heard a muffled drumming which I took to be Amabel beating on the closet door, and I heard the unforgettable voice of Lolotte, more highly pitched than I had ever heard it before. I encouraged the little boys to be on their way, and hustled Rose into the house.

"You'd better go down to the kitchen, and wait," I said. "I'll see what I can do."

I stood in the empty hallway listening to the pounding on the closet door and wondered what on earth was the best way to handle the situation. My eyes fell on Lolotte's handbag, lying on the chest where I had once seen Alice's coat sprawled in glossy splendor. It had been flung down, too, and it had spilled out a variety of passports, lipstick holders, key rings, and small wallets. Among the ruck I saw a piece of paper torn from the *Paris-Soir*. . . . I turned it over and saw myself, Max, Alice, and the clown. So that had brought Lolotte down upon us.

I looked up, and saw Lolotte glaring at me from the upper landing with eyes luminous with fury. Her appearance was

more shocking to me than her state of wild anger. She was terribly thin, and she had aged. She raised one hand, and pointed at me with arm and index finger fully extended.

"Ah, there he is, the bastard! The little jackal sniffing round the trail of the old beast his father. . . ."

She folded her arms, drawing herself up to her full height and inhaling deeply, filling her lungs for a further outburst of denunciation. When it came it was a good two minutes' worth of polemic about treachery and betrayal. It struck me when my first tendency to cower in panic had passed that she was having a thoroughly enjoyable time and giving a bravura performance modeled fairly closely on some French actress's interpretation of a melodramatic role. When she paused to take new breath I clapped with enthusiasm, and cried, bis, bis, with genuine admiration. Lolotte looked startled for one second, and then profoundly shocked.

"Richard, you ill-mannered brute, you are making fun of me."

"Of course I am. You're being magnificent, but you're over-doing it. Come off it now, do, you've made your big scene, and I'm getting a crick in the neck talking to you up the stairs."

Lolotte glared at me for a full second, and then walked down the curved stairs. We went into the drawing room together and fetched her a glass of brandy. She drank a little of it and looked round her with a wondering expression.

"And all this beige, and bourgeois coziness . . . is this the taste of the new woman?"

"What new woman?" I lit a cigarette as casually as I could. "The house was decorated by his daughter-in-law, John's wife, as a matter of fact."

"Richard, you are being tricky. You were in this picture at the circus that has driven me frantic. You know this woman, don't pretend to me that you don't. I know, and my instinct tells me what she is. I looked at this picture, and I knew at once. The old fox, the old billygoat, this woman is at the bottom of it—this is why he told me he must come to England, to get in

touch with the English public again, to gather material for new articles, to see his sons, to have medical treatment, to receive testimonials on his sixtieth birthday . . . it is all rubbish, it is all a new woman. . . ."

"You've got it all wrong, Lolotte. This house is the setting for a polite family comedy called Max's boys, or something of the kind. He came back to England to do all the things he told you, but mainly to bring his sons together. He suddenly felt guilty about our not being a united family, and he bought this place to give us a rallying point. Partly for that, partly to be a façade for this birthday affair. He's been around as a writer for nearly forty years, and now he's graduating as a Grand Old Man of English letters. It's nothing to do with any woman."

"No? Then this *poule* in the photograph, this creature dripping with sex, what explanation of her do you give me?"

"Oh, Alice, Alice Carver is a friend of mine. Max was taking us out. That's all."

"Your mistress, hein?"

"Er, yes, my mistress."

Lolotte threw her head back and laughed.

"Oh, Richard, forgive me. You tried that hard, but you're a hopeless liar. Tell me the truth." She swallowed some more brandy. "You owe it me. We're old friends."

"I'm not sure that I can. I'm not sure that I know it." I groped in my mind for obscure suspicions that I hadn't altogether faced, and found them taking shape in my mouth as words. "Max did come here with some idea of uniting his family, with putting together the pieces that lay scattered about. I suppose he thought they'd be lying where he left them when he walked out. Then he found the pieces of the family had changed. We've all become used to being fragments, we've fitted ourselves into other patterns. We've got our own lives, we aren't just notions in his head. At Christmas time when he got us all into a room together he saw it. We aren't as interesting or as pliable as his notions were, we bored him. When he saw what we were like he dropped us, and called the comedy off. The

woman you saw in the picture was there, and he took up with her to fill in the blank. That's the truth . . . it's what he does to everybody, all the time."

"And you don't mind?"

"No. He's Max. How can one mind?"

"You've grown up, Richard, it amazes me how you've grown up. And I've grown old."

Lolotte finished her glass of brandy, and fingered the empty glass.

"I'll get the bottle."

As I went through the hall I heard Amabel beating on the door of the closet, and I turned aside to set her free.

"You must have heard me before." She stepped angrily out from among the brooms and the tins of floor polish.

"I did. But I couldn't let you out till she'd calmed down."

"It's an outrage. I've never been treated so vilely, or spoken to in such a fashion. I'd like to give her a piece of my mind."

"I shouldn't, Amabel," I said. "It'll only lead to more trouble and unpleasantness. You'd best just go on home and forget about it."

"I can't bear to leave poor Max in the hands of such dreadful people. . . ."

I shrugged my shoulders and went and got Lolotte her bottle of brandy. When I came through the hall again Amabel had gone.

"That woman you let out of the closet," Lolotte said, "who is she? She is a most uncouth, rude person for Max to have about him, even as a secretary."

"That was Fred's wife. I don't think you were very tactful with her."

"She ordered me out of the house. She was very ill bred. It is incredible that Max should have let one of his sons marry such a woman. What can he have been thinking of? He is so careless about his children's future. You mustn't allow yourself to drift into marriage with such a nonentity—with the kind of girl one can push into a closet—it's ignoble to be married to an inferior."

"She's not the kind of woman I'm thinking of, no."

Lolotte took a sip of brandy and rolled it round her mouth before swallowing it, looking at me thoughtfully.

"So you're thinking of marriage, at your age? Perhaps you need Ermine again to teach you not to be English and heavy and serious. She came to England with me . . . you'll find her at the Murray Hotel, she's waiting to hear from me. Perhaps you'd be a nice surprise for her, who knows?"

I got to my feet.

"Promise you won't start shouting at Max again . . . it didn't do any harm in France, they understand scenes—but they aren't understood in St. John's Wood . . . you are going to be good, aren't you? . . ."

"I'll give him a little torment, for hurting me. But I won't shock any more people, tonight anyway, now I've got Max to myself."

"Well, I'll run along and see if I can find Ermine."

When I came out into the hall Max was leaning over the stair rail peering downwards. "Where is she? . . ." he whispered. "Have you talked to her?"

"Yes. She's in the drawing room, in a pretty reasonable frame of mind."

Max came to the foot of the stairs and put his hand on my shoulder. "I'm sorry about all this . . . well, it can't be helped. Lolotte is Lolotte. . . ."

"What about Alice?"

"I spoke to her on the upstairs telephone. . . ." He mopped his forehead with his handkerchief. "That's all right for the time being. . . ."

"I'll be getting along. I'll be in late, I expect . . . so good night, Father."

"I think that's best . . . good night, Old Son."

I stood and watched him walking warily up to the drawing room door and going in with his head cocked a little on one side, and after I had listened to the murmur of voices for a minute I went off to find Ermine. Murray's Hotel stands on the corner of Iwerne and Portesham streets at a point halfway between Piccadilly and Oxford Street on the northern frontiers of Mayfair and quite a considerable way from St. John's Wood. I had plenty of time to think as I walked down past Lord's Cricket Ground and through down-atheels Paddington towards Ermine. It was hard to imagine Ermine at Murray's. The place had been "smart" in the eighties. It had gone down very quickly after that, and had become a headquarters in town for retired people from places like Cheltenham and Bournemouth who had come up for the Chelsea Flower Show. I tried to think of Ermine among the drifts of gray ladies, and gray gentlemen, military and clerical, who incessantly whispered or wrote letters in the public rooms among the potted palms, and I squirmed at the thought. I dawdled. It was going to be hell meeting Ermine in London, her place was in the South of France, in my dreams. Passing through Dorset Square I realized an awful thing, Ermine was a dodge, a refined way of thinking about sex. I wasn't in love with her at all, and never had been. But I had pretended to be in love with her and I had written love letters to her. And she had come to England trusting in my word, she would certainly be expecting me to marry her.

I waited for her in the palm lounge, sitting stiffly on a brocaded unsociable in the middle of the room. Behind me a gray-haired lady knitted while her companion read out the names of the movies playing at the local theatres. I looked up and there was Ermine. She was wearing a Garboish hat that framed her entirely unmade-up face, and her hands were jammed mannishly into the pockets of a coat with excessively padded shoulders. Her expression was severe, a little scornful and a little apprehensive. I saw that she had changed. The glow of youth had left her. I stood up with a social smile as she said, "So there you are—I expected to find you in the lobby."

"It's good to see you."

It was clear that I was not to kiss her, and we shook hands. We walked in silence, and in a curious agony of awkwardness, out of the palm lounge and into the lobby.

"What brings you to London?"

"Lolotte."

"You didn't want to come."

"No, Lolotte insisted." She looked about her with distaste. "I told her it would be no good."

"That sounds odd."

"It is, rather. Lolotte and I aren't getting on any more. We've been quarreling all year. I gave way to her in this out of loyalty to our old friendship. But it's the parting of the ways—definitely."

"What have you been fighting about?"

"Oh, all sorts of things—my engagement, and fundamentals. How one should live, how one should not live." She looked about her. "Isn't there some café we could go to . . . we can't talk in this morgue."

"I don't know . . . there aren't any cafés . . . not in London, there are pubs, and tea shops, but not what you have in mind."

"Well then we'll just have to walk, I suppose. It's all so mournful and drab," she said. "I have the impression that England is finished. Lolotte told me I had to come to think things out in a healthier atmosphere. She's a tragic figure, in a way, she represents something pathetic Germany has outgrown. I am for the New Germany. My whole life has changed. I was futile and disgraceful but now I've grown up. A great many of us in Germany have discovered sanity. A wonderful new life is beginning."

"What's happened, Ermine, have you got religion or something?"

"No, I haven't—well, it's not religion. It's a matter of faith, in myself, in my country." She pulled off her hat and shook out her hair, dazzling in its cleanness and vitality. "It's a matter of

having a purpose in life. I am engaged to a wonderful man and we have a glorious life planned together, not just for ourselves but for our country and our children's happiness. Lolotte can't see it. She has these old bohemian ideas of personal happiness. We argue in circles. She said I had to come here to see—something, I don't know what . . . there's a marvelous togetherness in Germany now, we're all going towards the same goal together as comrades. Here I see nothing but lost people, and an empty life. I shan't come back. Lolotte hoped I'd stay."

"Do you mean you're going in for all that Hitler stuff?"

"He is a very great man, until you have heard the Leader you don't know what greatness there is in the human heart waiting to be called forth."

"I don't believe it's any good, you know."

"I don't suppose you would."

"This chap you're going to marry, is he a nice chap?"

"He is a young officer, a fine young man. He will be one of the makers of a new Germany and a new world, and I will give him support with my love and help create the new order by giving him strong and beautiful children. We will bury and forget the horrible past."

Her words had, along with their brisk certainty, a curious effect of disengagement from the figure walking along beside me. I watched her as she spoke, with sidelong glances, and realized that she was speaking these empty phrases from no great depth in her mind, they had as little to do with her as I had. The realization was wounding and I tried to assert myself.

"The horrible past of which I am part? I don't remember anything degraded or low."

"No . . ." her voice changed slightly, "I don't mean that." She let me take her hand, and we walked on with linked fingers.

"Was it a help?" she said gently.

"The greatest possible help."

"Even worth the pain of thinking you were in love with me for so long?"

"Yes—and in a way that's been a help, too."

"I'm glad." It was a very small smile, no more than a slight softening at the corner of her mouth.

"It's idiotic trying to talk like this," I said, "I've just thought of a place over by the park—it's a skating rink, actually in a sort of club—you have to be a member to get in—there's a café in a gallery upstairs where you can sit and watch. . . ."

We sat over a pot of tea in the gallery while the skaters swirled in their dreamlike swooping below us, endlessly circling the outer oval of the converted hotel ballroom. Ermine put an elbow on the table and cupped her chin in her hand, looking down over the parapet.

"I dreaded meeting you." She didn't turn towards me.

"I did too, or at least from the minute I knew you were in London. I thought I'd been longing for it."

"I thought you were going to be—you know—frantic for bed, and sentimental about it. You write terrible letters—forced—they didn't sound true. Well, that's putting it mildly. They were dishonest, really—they meant bed, bed, and they said love, love, love. You mustn't ever write to anyone that way again."

"I don't believe I will."

"Lolotte thought—she had the greatest hopes—that you'd be passionate, irresistible, and that you'd break me down—so that I wouldn't go back."

"I thought you'd believed me, my letters I mean, and that you were going to deliver yourself like a due bill on my door-step."

"It's wonderful to find that we're friends. I haven't talked, really talked, to anyone for, oh, I don't know how long. . . ." Her eyes were following a girl in a red dress on the floor. "But there's no question for me of not going back, there's no question of my not marrying Wieland . . . it's not a question of what I want or don't want . . . my world isn't like that any more, We all talk like that—the way I was talking about the new life—because there doesn't seem to be any point holding

out—it's not any use what one person does as a person—something else is in charge, a force—not him, although he rides it, and seems to be it—the Leader, I mean—but history, something flowing, something stronger than any person, the shape of the time. I've settled for what seems the least bad thing my time has to offer, Wieland, babies, a place of refuge that doesn't mark me out as a fugitive—I can't explain."

"It doesn't offer happiness."

"No—but happiness isn't possible—what's coming isn't going to be a happy time, not for anyone."

She laid her hand down on the table cloth, reaching towards me, and I placed a hand on hers. We sat in silence for a minute. I knew that she was appealing to me, to destroy her belief in what she had come to accept, to give her instead reasons to believe in an uncontaminated happiness. I wanted to be able to do that. But I had worked nothing out. All my life I had lived alone, inside a wall of my own desires, inside the ghetto of my own demands for happiness. For the first time I really became aware of a need greater than my own, of the identity of another person. Ermine slipped her hand from under mine and patted it. The skaters were thinning out, and the waiter in his brassbuttoned white coat and scarlet trousers was hovering with our bill. The place was nearly empty. Everyone was going home to dinner. I paid, and we moved off. It was one of those shapeless evenings that are inflicted on the young who have no places of their own. We went to a cocktail bar and talked until dinner time, we moved on to a restaurant and ate, and from there to a club and danced, talking in circles at each place, always conscious of the attendant waiters, the people at other tables, the stir and movement round us. At the dance club we became a little tipsy, grew heated, and quarreled. It occurred to me that it would be clever to say that I thought she ought to be very happy with Wieland, and that she'd chosen the life she was made for. And then I looked at her and saw that she was nearly in tears.

"I'm sorry, Ermine, I've been so stupid. . . ."

"No you haven't, I'm in a state, that's all. You must take me home—back to the hotel."

In the taxi her tears came, and with tears the need for sheltering arms and a shoulder to cry on. I stroked her soft sweetsmelling hair. Sympathy created tenderness and one emotion passed insensibly into another. Presently she turned up her blind tear-wet face and we kissed mouth to mouth. When the taxi slowed up in front of the hotel she murmured, "Don't leave me now," and pulled on her hat so that her tear-stained face would be shadowed in the lobby.

In the morning she seemed completely happy, and when I woke I heard her singing to herself as she ran a bath. I called to her and she came through from the bathroom humming and still brushing her hair with long sweeping strokes, to sit down on the bed beside me holding the brush in her lap with one hand and touching my bare shoulder with the other.

"I wish I was in love with you," she said. "You're really very nice."

"Yes, it's a greaty pity we aren't in love."

"Well, facts have to be faced—I think I shall go back to Germany today." She bent down and kissed me, a peck on the forehead. I tried to take her by the shoulders but she wriggled free and stood back.

"Be good . . . and when you see Lolotte at Max's tell her I'm going—" She went over and looked at some papers beside her handbag on top of the bureau. "The boat train leaves Liverpool Street at six—tonight I'll be being seasick, and tomorrow I'll have breakfast in Holland."

I walked home between eleven and twelve in brilliant sunshine. I let myself in, and when I had hung up my coat I started upstairs. As I reached the head of the stairs the door of Max's study flew open and Lolotte appeared in the opening. She spun right about as she opened it, without apparently seeing me, and gave vent to a passionate cry of "Never, never, never!" on a

rising scale. It was as dramatic and as alarming as the unexpected striking of a cuckoo clock. I stood frozen and heard Max's voice from inside the room speaking in tones of exasperated, martyred reasonableness.

"But she's indispensable, she's the best secretary I've ever had, I can't face breaking in another . . . you must apologize to her . . . please, Lolotte. . . ."

"Ah, secretary. I know you old men and your secretaries
... the shut doors, and the 'taking dictation' after luncheon
... I know what all this means. I am no simpleton, you cannot make a fool of me so easily. I will not lend myself to your
degradation. ..."

"Lolotte, I won't listen to any more of this. . . ."

"So now I touch you on the raw, now I begin to see the nigger in the woodpile—this is the big thing for which you will fight—it is not the simple foolish Alice I should keep my eye on—she is just a pastime, a diversion, a blind, behind her skirts I see the big thing—Amabel is the serious threat. You are an artful old villain, but I am not deceived. I will have things out with this slyboots, so plainly dressed and so demure, who has used the son as a stalking horse for the father. This we will settle, once and for all. I will talk to your woman, face to face, the whole squalid machinery of this fantastic ménage will be unveiled. . . ."

"I forbid it. . . ."

"You, you monster, it no longer lies in your power. . . ."
Lolotte swung round again and started towards the head of
the stairs, with Max behind her desperately grabbing at her
and being shaken off.

"Listen to me, Lolotte, for heaven's sake stop and listen." I made an unsuccessful attempt to withdraw backwards into the wall, and then found myself involved in the scene, as a piece of driftwood is swept up into a breaking wave. Lolotte paused, and fixing me with an outstretched pointing arm, launched into a denunciation of Amabel while Max stood behind her holding the sides of his head with his hands. His eyes met mine and I

read in them pain, unhappiness, and an appeal which I did not wholly understand, but which I realized was not so much for him as for her. While this silent exchange took place her tirade flowed over me and round me.

As I listened to her I was faintly conscious that I had heard a bell ringing somewhere in the depths of the house. I had seen too, out of the corner of my eye, the maid coming into the hall, hesitating, withdrawing, and then, as the bell rang again, reappearing and vanishing in the direction of the front door. But I hadn't paid this sequence of events enough attention to think what it might mean because its possible significance had been crowded out of my mind by the sudden realization that I was faced with someone whose imaginings in certain departments had a greater reality than any facts. As this dawned on me I met Max's eyes again and understood the nature of the appeal he was making. To say that Lolotte was mad was the one perfect defense against her that he had, and the one that no amount of humiliation and distress could force him to adopt. A loyalty to what she had been, to what they had shared, prevented him from making the declaration that would take the sting out of all her inventions and reduce them to the level of ravings; and he was afraid, terribly afraid, now that Lolotte was no longer armed with her beauty, that some victim like Amabel would stumble on the key, and by uttering the words mad or madness, push her over the edge of the world of realities and into the abyss of her private illusions.

I flinched from this sight of the depths over which we were poised, and looked helplessly down into the hall. For a moment I could not quite believe what I was seeing. Under the stress of the unfamiliar circumstances the young maidservant's social defenses had broken down and she had ushered a little knot of Japanese gentlemen into the house. There were as a matter of fact only four of them, but they gave the impression of a crowd as they stood gleaming with embarrassed smiles and flashing spectacles, bowing rapidly and uneasily, and darting glances upwards, away, and at each other. Lolotte broke off in the middle

of a sentence describing the burning sexual hunger of a plain woman feeling that youth has gone and that age is approaching, while Max moaned. With an excess of superhuman strength he grabbed her round the waist and rushed her, backwards, into his study. The door slammed behind them. I found it necessary to mop my face with my handkerchief, and as I did so, feeling horribly weak at the knees, the bowing below became frantic as if a lot of mechanical toys had been set off.

I took a firm grip on myself and went down, smiling a smile that must have been fully as Japanese as any of theirs, and groping for a suitable remark. I found myself at last on their level, still with nothing to say, bowing automatically in response to the bows that were being offered to me.

"I'm afraid," I muttered, "that you'll have to excuse Mr. Town. . . ."

"Oh, no—surely not." The spokesman's eyes seemed enormously enlarged behind his thick-lensed spectacles. "We are luncheon guests. The arrangement is of long standing. The engagement was, indeed, made in the course of correspondence conducted by myself on behalf of these gentlemen from Toyko. . . ."

He broke into a rattle of translated explanation, interrupted by hissings and ejaculations, from his companions who stared at me, rather with apprehension than annoyance. Over their heads I saw that the dining room door was slightly open and through it I saw a table set with an unusually large number of covers. We were, clearly, in for lunch.

"Well, then, I am sure everything will turn out all right.
. . ." I was conscious that the phrase had gone a little wrong, and bowed slightly to cover up my impoliteness. It set them all off again, but beaming this time.

"I am neglecting the introductions. I am myself Professor of English Teminoku of Osaka University, this is Professor of English Hyatami of Nara University, this is Professor of Natural Science Suzaku of Jikoyen University, this is Professor of Sociology Nakamura of Osaka University. You, no doubt, are employed in some secretarial capacity by Mr. Town?"

"Well, no, not exactly, actually my name is Richard Savage—I'm just a guest, well, you could say a relative . . . anyway I'm staying with Mr. Town for the time being."

While I floundered I observed that sherry and biscuits had been put out and the formal business of pouring glasses and handing round cheese crackers helped us through the next few minutes. And then when an awkward silence developed it was time for second glasses all round. The dry Amontillado, a delicately pale yellow, had something of the flavor of sake and the visitors drank it rather as if it were that familiar drink, putting back their glasses as if they were the little china thimbles in which the rice wine is usually served. They were fairly large sherry glasses. I noticed after a while that Hyatami, Suzaku, and Nakamura had quite rosy complexions and was intrigued because I had never thought of Japanese as having that kind of color. We none of us noticed for quite some time that Max had come into the room and was standing in silent astonishment just inside the door.

The introductions were difficult. The shock of suddenly finding Max with us confused me and I found it surprisingly hard to remember which Japanese was which and what his post and university was. There were a number of corrections, made with polite hissings that indicated that my mistakes were not resented but that the record should be kept straight. These on top of several outbreaks of uncontrollable giggling drew the proceedings out for longer than seemed necessary or desirable. I felt weak and a little scared when it was all over and the social initiative had passed into Max's hands.

"I think we might go in to lunch straight away," he said, somewhat coldly.

"We would prefer it if you were to receive our gifts first," said Professor Teminoku, bowing, losing his balance, and re-

covering by grabbing a chair back. "Then with the formalities completed we could take luncheon in a more relaxed atmosphere."

The proposal was apparently agreeable to everyone except Max, and he assented to it with a gesture that was more one of surrender than of consent. His head was on one side and inclined forwards, his hands clenched by his side as he listened to Teminoku running through a speech, evidently learned by heart, which expressed the admiration and esteem in which Max Town was held by liberal Japan in general and the friends of English culture in Osaka University in particular. While he was speaking the hall clock struck two with firmness. Hyatami made a similar speech that was rather longer. Suzaku spoke for scientific Japan, progressive Japan, the scientists of his faculty, disclosed the fact that he had written a novel, compared Max with Zola and, to his evident surprise, with Ruskin and Carlyle, and went on to speak for an association of Japanese writers who had charged him with a message of congratulation which he proceeded to read. This message was signed by forty-two members of the association whose names he read out. It was then Nakamura's turn. He began by giving a brief outline of the history of sociology in Japan. Before nineteen hundred Japanese sociology had been influenced by various persons like Bentham and Mill whose ideas, though good, seemed to Nakamura and men of his generation to be fundamentally cold and inhuman. Between nineteen hundred and nineteen hundred and twenty there had been much heart-searching among Japanese workers in this field, in the course of which it was often said that Western thinkers were too inhuman to provide inspiration for Japanese, they had too alien an approach. Then in the work of Max Town Nakamura and his colleagues had discovered a warmth of spirit, an emotional kinship, that bridged the gulf of racial difference.

Max made a short reply, at first uncertain, and then abruptly exceedingly graceful and deft.

"And now," he said, "lunch. Lead the way, Richard. . . ."
"The gifts, the gifts, please," cried Teminoku.

"Yes, oh yes, certainly, the gifts," said Max faintly.

The room filled with wrapping paper as brocaded boxes were unveiled, then the boxes were opened and a snow of tissue papers fell everywhere, then silk bags with heavy silk cords and tassels appeared, and these at last yielded up the presents: a hideous netsuke, intricate and a dirty brown; a dark green jade disk carved with the symbols of the Japanese zodiac; a very early cast-iron duck of great beauty; a dark purple coat of a richer silk than I had ever seen or touched before. Max was deeply moved by the story which these objects told; they were, even the remarkably ugly netsuke, precious things of the kind that collectors and museums compete for—and they were all paid for by writers, schoolteachers, and university professors and lecturers who lived, as he knew, lives of the narrowest poverty.

"I don't believe I deserve these magnificent gifts. . . ." he said in a low tone, and looked up.

It was apparent that the shock of his sudden appearance was wearing off. Nakamura swayed slightly and hiccupped loudly.

"I think we really should go through to luncheon," said Max, this time with authority.

As we walked through the hall I saw that the hands of the clock were announcing that it was ten minutes to three.

They left in a happy daze at half past four, climbing into a taxicab in fits of giggles like so many schoolgirls.

"If there's much more of that sort of thing I shall really feel seventy by the time these celebrations are all over. . . ." Max said and looked thoughtful. "I think you made a mistake in letting them have all that sherry, you know. I hope they don't get into some sort of scrape. . . ."

"I'm sorry. It just happened somehow."

"Things do happen—they can't be helped." He paused. "Look, I want you to take a note round to Alice. I haven't written it yet, it'll take five minutes or so—could you be ready to go out thenabouts?"

"Yes, of course—and that reminds me. I've got a message for Lolotte from Ermine—it had clean gone out of my head. I'd better go up."

"I don't know if she'll be awake. I gave her a sleeping tablet. Don't wake her if she is asleep . . . won't it keep?"

"Ermine's going back to Germany tonight."

Max balanced the iron duck in the palm of his hand, and let a second pass.

"What a beautiful thing this is . . . I suppose I was very stupid about you and Ermine."

"I don't think so. As it was it all came to nothing because Lolotte set it up."

"You're not blaming her, I hope," he said sharply.

"No, of course not. But we were made for each other—I don't know—there's a complete sympathy, everything. But because it wasn't an accidental discovery, because the whole thing was ready-made, contrived, because it didn't flow naturally out of our own lives it didn't flow into it. You can't force these things."

"What a lot you know about life, Dickie."

"Now you're laughing at me."

"Yes, but in the friendliest possible way." He patted my shoulder. "Run along and freshen up while I write that note."

I went to my room and when I had dipped my head in cold water and swallowed several glasses of it I swore that I would never drink sherry before lunch again. With a clean shirt on I felt a great deal better and quite ready to face Lolotte. I opened the door of the dressing room where she lay resting and peered into the darkness to see if she were awake. There was no sound. For a moment I thought she must be sleeping very quietly but almost at once I recognized the unmistakable sensation that tells one that a room is empty. The tension of another presence was not there. I snapped on the light and looked over to the bed. I had never seen a dead body before but I had no doubt of what I was looking at. I went slowly downstairs, feeling a greensick emptiness.

"I'll be with you in a minute," said Max.

"No, you must telephone for a doctor at once."

"You're looking very white," Max said looking up from the little rolltop desk in the drawing room and staring at me. "It could be just the sherry, couldn't it? Perhaps you'd better go upstairs and lie down. I'll call the doctor if you're still feeling badly at dinner time."

"It's not me, it's Lolotte."

"Lolotte!" He started to his feet.

"Don't go up. There's nothing you can do."

We faced each other for an age.

"Are you quite sure?"

I nodded. I watched him bend over and tear the note to Alice across and across. Then he went over to the telephone and I heard him asking his doctor to come round. I stood empty-minded until he had finished, and remained empty-minded until Max came and put an arm round my shoulder.

"Don't take it too hard. Remember, Lolotte would have hated to get old. . . ."

It made me think of Ermine. She would want to know. I went down to her hotel and found that she had already left for the station. Getting another cab outside Murray's took several minutes, and the traffic as we went eastwards across London was heavy. The minutes lagged away in one jam after another and just before we reached Liverpool Street I heard a clock striking six. When I got inside a railwayman was taking down the indicator at the end of the platform that said 6 p.m. Harwich—Hook of Holland, Continental Boat Train, and replacing it with another that said 6.25 p.m. All Stations, Bishops Stortford and Norwich. I stood there realizing that there were things in life that could come to a definite and final end. Ermine was really gone.

It was Alice who took charge of our lives in the next few days. When my trance of self-pity lifted at last in Liverpool station I went to a phone booth and called her. It had occurred to me that Max was alone in the house with Lolotte's body and that he might need the support of Alice's gentleness and understanding to see him through the strain and unhappiness that I felt sure Amabel would manage to create in dealing with the practical side of death. I could imagine her coming back to the house radiating a Calvinist confidence that Lolotte had met no more than her just reward for locking up one of the elect in a cupboard, and I felt that Max would find her tight-lipped triumph very hard to bear. It is easy to be wrong about these things. Lolotte's death somehow punctured Amabel's self-confidence entirely, perhaps she was appalled to see that energy and will power as great or greater than her own could wither like the grass in an hour. At any rate she collapsed into tearfulness and inefficiency almost at once and had to be taken home within a few hours of her being sent for. Alice handled everything, getting in touch with the Essling-Sterlinghovens by telegram, finding out in a telephone conversation conducted in perfect German what they wanted done, and then making all the funeral arrangements. Lolotte was cremated at their request, and a representative of the family, the Freiherr Geyr von Essling-Sterlinghoven and Erlencamp, flew over to attend the ceremony and to take the ashes home. I expected him to be a tall thin Prussian Junker but he was a round-faced tubby little man who found a naturally jolly temperament hard to suppress for the occasion. At tea time I told Max what an awfully nice chap I had thought he was, and he snorted.

"You don't know what he is, I've looked him up."

"Oh? Isn't he just a racing man?"

"He's a lieutenant-colonel, one of the brains of their new

army, a fanatic for mechanization. He's even crazier about tanks than this fellow Fuller, or Liddell Hart."

"Isn't that sensible enough? If he is a soldier, I mean, isn't that the line he'd have to take?"

"All right, but don't tell me what a decent fellow he is. He's busy making a meat-axe that's going to bust everything up one of these days." He got to his feet. "I've got to go and work on that birthday speech of mine some more," he said, "I'll see you later."

"The old man seems rather on edge," I said to Alice when he'd gone.

"Well, it's been a hard day. And there are some American professors for dinner tonight—if they're like their letters they're going to be rather heavy going. Poor pet, it's hard work for him being a public monument on top of the other thing."

"It must have been horrible for him to find that she'd suddenly burnt out like a match. I don't suppose he'll really feel it until the rush of this next week lets up and lets him down."

"You're not to patronize him." Alice spoke unusually sharply, but her voice immediately softened. "What he hasn't yet realized, and what will hurt him when he does, is how much he has longed for just that."

"But," I tried to put my discovery on the day of her death into words, "the enormous tenderness he put into trying to shield her from other people . . . he must have loved her."

"Of course he had loved her, and loved her for having loved him. But there aren't any greater burdens than those one takes up out of a sense of pity. And when one has shouldered them it's more than angelic not to want sooner or later to be relieved of them. You'll find that out, sooner or later. Lolotte became a dead weight that prevented him from living with any kind of ease years ago, he couldn't help wanting a simpler happiness. He had no chance of having it while she was alive. And his being her victim was the only thing that kept her alive."

"I can't think of her as a sort of vampire."

"You only had the wild fun of her. You could, perhaps,

glimpse the horrors of her private remorse, but you never had to help her to put it aside. There was no one else to do it. Max had undertaken that. Now he begins to see how much he gave up, and to what little purpose. The next stage, and the worst, is when he faces up to admitting how much he longed to get away oh, ages ago, and what a blessed relief it is to know that he won't ever have to worry again about what is going to come into her head to think or to do."

"But he didn't find it very hard to throw other people away, when it suited him."

"I don't know. I think you'd be surprised to find that he's been chucked more often than not. Women aren't, you know, really as maternal as they're made out to be. That's a warning."

"You mean that women want men to be as interested in them as they are in themselves?"

"Something like that." She smiled. "I can see in your eye that you're on the verge of asking what draws me to him—well it's my business and his, and none of yours. That's not a snub—and you're not to pretend that it is. It's just that I won't have you being as tremendously absorbed in me as you were in Lolotte. I'm going to take Max away after this shindig is over. I've never seen the East and he hasn't either, I'm taking him to India, and the places beyond. We'll be gone for a year, perhaps longer. You will be on your own feet when we get back, won't you?"

"I should think so."

"We'll find you absolutely wrapped up in something that has nothing to do with Max—and in some girl who isn't a bit like Lolotte, or me, or even like Naomi, and you'll scarcely have time to do more than say hello to us . . . it'll be wonderful."

"It sounds as if you're awfully keen to get rid of me."

"It's what anyone who was really fond of you would want," she said. "Dear Richard, do try and make a go of it."

It was the last talk we had of that kind. When we were alone together after that she kept things on a cheerful, easy, social level of inconsequence. I found it wounding at first. But after a day or two of being at a loose end and feeling like a lost dog I started to look up school friends who lived in London and one

or two young people I had met down in Wiltshire through Naomi's colonel and I found that there was a surprising amount to do and to talk about with them. And then all of a sudden there were no more distinguished or undistinguished foreign visitors at the house, and what coming and going that there was had to do with preparations for Max's departure for the Far East.

Life seemed strangely quiet in the next two years. Although I was doing a great deal and having a very good time, I felt the absence of Max.

But there were the pleasures of learning to think and there were other grounds, too, for enjoying Oxford. Stetson, my best friend, was a keen poker player and a temperate drinker—these bald facts conjure up for me the curious beauty of a green baize table covered with brilliant cards, the fascinating tensions of the game, a window curtain flapping gently as a soft air steals in from the Garden Quad which is filled with the scent of a warm June evening, and the flavor of hock and seltzer. There were winter delights too, nicely combined of worldly and intellectual elements. Stetson, myself, Frank Jowett, the grandson of Irving's great rival, and a dozen others had a little private drama society that read plays and listened to critical papers.

And behind it all there was Marshwood and its solid peace. When I was there I felt that the itching, nagging crisis that was building up in the newspapers was an ephemeral thing and that here was the solid enduring fabric of reality. Colonel Arthur ministered to it and cherished it, so that it was easy to think of him not simply as a property owner doing what he would with his own, but as a contributor to a mystique, almost as the holder of a priestly office. Naomi seemed to be wholeheartedly his assistant and I began to feel every time I went back that we had always been there, and that we would always be there. The future seemed to stretch away solidly beyond any mere incident of foreign politics, so certainly that it was impossible to imagine any shift of circumstances that could destroy it. At the center, there was Naomi's happiness in her absorption in the routine of

the house and the life of the place. Her face was tranquil and although I sometimes looked for them I never saw those gleams from behind her face, slipping out through her eyes, of the old Naomi quickly gauging my reactions to her performance, and the few hints that were given to me during my second year at Oxford only became recognizable for what they were in the light of later events.

There was a letter from the Colonel that mentioned in passing that Naomi was very much taken up with helping the local Women's Institute put on a comedy for a national competition, and then months later another, saying, "Your mother is very cock a hoop with her triumphs as a producer. I daresay she'll tell you all about it when we come up to see you on Thursday." When I saw them the following week the matter had gone out of my head and I forgot to ask how the village actresses had made out in their competition. They had, apparently, won and had very much enjoyed their excursion to London for the finals. It was the Colonel who brought the subject up, and who described the victory with beaming pride. While he talked Naomi smiled indulgently and seemed to concentrate on her cold salmon. When he'd finished she looked up almost absently and asked me a question.

"Is this boy Frank Jowett as good as they say?"

"I think he's going to be." I looked across the restaurant where we were eating and saw him, with his big actor's face, deep in conversation with another undergraduate who was taking part in the University Dramatic Society's *Coriolanus*. "Would you like to meet him?"

I brought him over to be introduced and Naomi gave him a businesslike, oddly penetrating look as he shook her hand.

"You have your grandfather's looks," she said, "if you've half his talent you should have a great future."

"I'm surprised that you should know who my grandfather was," Jowett said, looking flattered, and Naomi shook her head, deprecatingly.

"Oh, I'd recognize that strain anywhere," she said.

They talked for a minute and then Jowett went back to his table, obviously pleased that Naomi had heard that great things were expected of him. We went off after lunch to see some boat races and I thought no more of the matter until the next day when Frank came up from behind me on a bicycle near the Martyr's Memorial and then zigzagged slowly to keep pace with me, talking rather aimlessly. This and that came up and was dropped, and then the meeting at lunch.

"It was a funny thing your mother knowing I was taking the lead in *Coriolanus*, after all we've only been in rehearsal a week."

"I suppose that is odd." It hadn't struck me.

"Ah, well, it's one of these mysteries," he said. "Drop in at my place tonight, Stetson and one or two others are going to be there, Betty and the Swedes . . . it might be fun."

On this tentative note he pedaled off. I didn't think twice about what he had said, as there seemed to be nothing in his words to think about.

Nearer the production date of *Coriolanus* Larry Brook came up to Oxford to coach the producer who'd asked his professional advice. While he was there Larry asked me to lunch with him. I was glad to see him and I found him a little grayer, plumper, and a great deal happier. He'd given up, he told me, trying to be Chekhov, and he was finding it much simpler to be busily and successfully Larry Brook.

"It's middle age, or worse perhaps," he said, "this settling down to a modest acceptance of the fact that I am the best thing going in my middlebrow line, but it's very restful. I feel very fatherly now when I see you young fellows setting out to prove you're geniuses."

"What are you really up to?" I asked.

"Oh, plotting as usual. Scheming to pull youthful genius down to my level."

"How you harp on that theme."

"Well, I'm after Frank Jowett, really. He's full of notions about playing in art-theatre versions of Crime and Punishment,

Kafka, and all that, and I've got a wonderful part for him in a thing of mine that's going to run for years and make him a matinee idol. . . ."

"Is it going to be a really good play, Larry?"

"The best I can manufacture . . ." Larry suddenly looked at me with an almost indecent curiosity and said deliberately, "It's got a wonderful part for an older woman in it."

"Whom are you thinking of?" I asked.

"Oh . . ." Larry's look of curiosity was replaced by one of amusement. "I have my ideas. I don't think I'll have any difficulty casting it." He sat back in his chair and pulled out a cigar case. "That question is pretty well settled, as a matter of fact—the only problem is this young man's part. He has to be convincingly breathtaking, young and incomplete, and he has to be a born actor. It has to be young Jowett, in short. And once I've got him we can fix the date of the New York opening. . . ."

"You don't usually open in New York, do you? I thought you liked to go there with an established hit."

Larry looked vastly amused by some secret joke again.

"Oh, there are special circumstances in this case . . . partly it's a question of the nature of the play—there are the two English characters and the others are Americans. I've rather fallen in love with America, as a matter of fact, head over heels . . . there's nothing in the world like autumn over there . . . nothing." He looked at me as if he expected me to see a joke and then his expression became almost contrite. "Forgive me," he said, "I've been being very tiresome, talking about myself so much. Tell me about your plans. . . ."

I was a little bewildered by his obvious embarrassment, and for some reason I felt awkward about talking to him about what I had decided that I had to do for the next few years.

"When I go down, when I leave the University, I shall be going into the Brigade, into the Colonel's old regiment."

"Oh my dear boy, my dear, dear boy . . ." Larry stared at me for a moment and then began to laugh almost uncontrollably. The tears streamed down his cheeks. I thought he was laughing at me because he assumed that I was going for a soldier to

please the Colonel, that this was evidence of a final capitulation to Marshwood and its spirit. I thought of trying to explain to him that my decision had nothing to do with that at all. That there was going to be a war now seemed beyond any question, every day's papers, every night's news report on the radio pointed to the inescapable fact. It would be soon enough to make private plans when the war had been fought and a private world returned. But it was useless to try to say anything of what was in my mind, there was no penetrating the wall of hysterical laughter which stood between us. For a moment I sat looking at him and then I got up and left him. As I walked angrily out of the restaurant I was conscious that there must be some reason for his outburst that I knew nothing about, and that I might get it if I demanded an explanation. But I was too angry to think what it might be or to wish to wait for it. And so I had no warning of what was to happen.

The summer term ended and I went off, after spending an uneventful night at Marshwood, to take part in the excavation of a Bronze Age camp on the Welsh border. The camp was on a hilltop not far from Tintern Abbey in the Wye Valley and it was a spectacularly lovely place. I enjoyed every minute I was there and I liked the niggling procedures of scientific archaeologythe concentration they demanded kept my mind off the news that was getting worse and worse as the year sloped away towards the Munich crisis. There were seven other volunteers from various universities helping at the dig and we were all very conscious that this was perhaps our last free summer before uniforms were put on us. We spoke very little about the future and concentrated on our work, on poaching fish out of the Wye, and on flirtations with the dark-haired and dark-eyed border girls who had a hint of the Welsh lilt in their musical voices. It was a happy time.

It was broken halfway through the second week in August by a telegram that simply said, "Come home as soon as you can. Arthur." I said good-bye to my new friends reluctantly and set out on a long cross-country journey that involved several

changes of trains and which seemed to take all day. The Colonel had signed the telegram so he couldn't be ill, and I felt sure, knowing him, that if it were Naomi who was in danger he would have found some kindly warning phrase that would have prepared me for bad news without alarming me.

The Colonel was in his study when I arrived, and I was shocked to find him as I did. He was sitting in front of his green leather-topped desk with his hands in his lap staring at the pigeonholes in front of him. When I came in he swiveled his head round towards me with an expression that had momentarily something hopeful in it but which then drained away leaving a woebegone blank in the place of his usual warm and hearty look.

"It's you," he said flatly. "I'm glad you've come . . . though I see, now that you're here, I was wrong to send for you. There's nothing you can do. I'm sorry, my boy. . . ." He slumped back in his chair. "I don't know what to say. . . ."

"Is there anything wrong, sir?"

"Yes, yes, there is. Everything's as wrong as it can possibly be." He raised his eyebrows and passed a hand across his forehead. "I can hardly believe that things are as wrong as they are. . . . It's your mother. She's gone . . . left me. . . . She doesn't mean to come back."

"You mean she's run away."

"Yes." He rubbed his forehead again with the same look of utter bewilderment. "It's very hard for me to credit . . . she seemed happy enough and she never complained . . . did she never say anything to you?"

"Not a word, sir."

"No hint of any kind? Nothing?" He faced me. "You had no idea of this American project?"

"American project, no . . ." A great light began to dawn upon me, I saw Larry shaking with laughter, and heard him saying, "It's got a wonderful part in it for an older woman."

"Well, I'll tell you what's happened." He stood up and began to pace the far end of the room. "About a month ago Naomi told me she was worried about one or two little symptoms, not of anything serious, but of something that ought to be looked into. Some woman's thing that she should consult a specialist about. So we made appointments in London. I was to have gone with her, but then the appointments were changed to days when I happened to have pressing things to attend to down here, quarter sessions, that sort of thing . . . so she went alone. She went up to town for a second examination three days ago. She telephoned me to say that Sir Charles Wykes, that's the doctor fella, wanted to give her a more thorough going-over than the first day's appointment allowed, night before last, and that she'd be home, last night it would have been . . . well, she didn't come. I telephoned her hotel. She wasn't there. I supposed she'd gone to stay with a friend. I called all the friends I could think of but she wasn't with any of them. I got a letter this morning . . . posted in Southampton. She sailed on the Queen Mary the night she was supposed to come back here. She's out at sea now on her way to New York . . . you're sure you know nothing about all this?"

"No, nothing . . . at least . . ." I tried to tell him about Larry Brook.

"I can't make head or tale of that rigmarole . . . the thing that I can't endure is what she says here. . . ." he pulled a letter out of his pocket with the immediately recognizable scrawl on it. ". . . She says she's been very happy here, begs me to forgive her, says she'll always be grateful to me, says she's not the sort of woman to make me happy, says she doesn't fit into my life, says that in all fairness she can't go on with a deception, says she's going to Reno, means divorce. . . ." He flapped the letter at me. "Can you understand all that? Do you know what she's thinking about? What she can mean? Say if you know." He stopped, staring at me. "Do you know?"

"Yes, sir. She's an actress. She's going back to the stage. She doesn't exist anywhere else. Larry Brook came to her with a perfect part, written for her. She couldn't bear not to take it. She will open in the play, I should say, towards the beginning of November in New York."

"I'll go after her. I'll contest the divorce. I'll make her see

"Not in that way. Don't torment yourself with thinking you've been left for anyone, a man. She's gone to the theatre, to be what she is."

There was a long silence.

"She told me she was sick of it . . . that the whole life had become horrible to her. Was she lying to me?"

"No, she believed it, absolutely, then."

"Have I been the damnedest of fools?"

"No."

"You couldn't very well have said yes. . . ."

"I would have if it had been true."

He grinned like a dog that has had poison.

"Then what in God's name has happened?"

"You offered her the perfect part, written for her, and she couldn't bear not to take it. It was a part she'd dreamed of playing all her life. . . ."

"Then I have been a damned fool."

"If you want to put it like that you can. But there's something else to be said. She was happier in the role you gave her, for longer, than anyone else ever made her."

"But in the end it wasn't a good enough part."

"She exhausted the possibilities that were in it for her."

"And now she's off to something else. . . ." He twisted his face into a grimace. "Upon my soul, you don't make her out very attractive. I can hardly bear to hear you talk this way."

"Tigers may not seem very attractive to goats, to see how splendid they are you have to take into account that they're tigers. She's Cleopatra to me, Shakespeare's not Shaw's, she's Nora, all kinds of people, quite different—irreconcilable. She's been a loving mother, and an absolutely indifferent one who had a child by mistake, she's been a cold-hearted bully, and a wonderful friend. I wouldn't, now I'm not demanding that she always appear in a particular role, have her any different. The price would be to destroy her. It's too high."

"You at least have a claim on her that she can't very well shake off when it suits her."

"It's the sort of claim that I have on the wind to bring me air to breathe. I count myself lucky to get it."

He considered it, and then spoke quietly in an extremely gentle voice.

"But I love her, you see, Richard."

"Then you can't want to tie her down—she has to be all the different women she has to be."

"It's very hard to see that."

"It's painful, but we have to face it."

We faced each other again for a space and then I saw that his face cleared. He touched the bell and after a minute Manson appeared, grave-faced, and electrified with an overmastering curiosity that made his eyes flicker nervously between us.

"Oh, Manson, young Richard here has been traveling all day. I can see that he's famished. What have we got for him?"

"There is the cold lamb, sir," said Manson in a sepulchral voice. "I think Cook has a cherry tart, and there would be cream—unless of course Master Richard would prefer something in the way of cheese?"

"I think the tart would be the thing."

"I expect you'd like to eat and tumble into bed," said the Colonel, "you look quite tuckered out. How about a tray in your room?"

I saw that it was his way of asking to be left alone, and said that I would like that very much.

When Manson had brought up my supper I went and sat over on the window seat. I knew that, as certainly as the sun would rise in the morning, there lay ahead a scene which I would have to play with the Colonel. He would tell me that what had happened had changed nothing between us, that I was still his heir and that I was to think of Marshwood as my home. He would mean what he said and we would both in our hearts know that everything was changed at the roots, that Naomi's departure had made my position at Marshwood altogether false and that we would inevitably as the years went by drift apart. The true

link between us was broken, and if he still made me his heir he would be handing his beloved house across a gulf, to one who would be as much a stranger as any other future owner that chance might bring along. Had she gone simply to bring that breach about? Could it be simply that she found that her place at center stage had been usurped by the juvenile as the result of the Colonel's action in handing me the future of his house and its properties? Had she, as the implications of this came home to her, thrown up the part and left the stage? I wondered too what had taken her so precipitately back to it. The magnitude of the challenge presented by Larry's play—it was in Larry's mind Frank Jowett's opportunity, it was a machine to lift this youth with all his natural gifts out of obscurity into a position to take the theatrical chieftainship which his great actor-manager grandfather had enjoyed—provided a motive.

What could she do but leave us . . . she was not one of those like Alice, one of the dressers of life, standing ready in the wings with the costume for the quick change, or waiting in the dressing room with all the apparatus for a new role. She was one of the leads round whom the plays of life turned. The curtain had come down on the Marshwood comedy and we, the supers, had to look for other parts. We might grumble that she had prematurely ended a long run by walking out and setting us "at liberty," as they say in the theatrical employment advertisements, but that was only because we shrank from recognizing her right to a larger theatre than we could or would provide.

The quiet dark outside the room presented itself not as a void now but as a darkened stage on which anything and everything might happen. A huge tragedy called war was in preparation, a piece with parts of every kind in it, the Colonel as a soldier already probably had his chosen for him in some file in the War Office in London. I would be able to choose my own. And when that piece was played out the whole of life would open out again before us. It was not at all a bad thing to be "at liberty" and free.



Drawings by Mircea Vasiliu



AN ABRIDGEMENT

# The Author

EMILY KIMBROUGH, Indiana-born, resigned the managing editorship of the Ladies' Home Journal to devote herself to her twin daughters and writing. Her first book, the famous Our Hearts Were Young and Gay was written in collaboration with Cornelia Otis Skinner. Miss Kimbrough lives in New York, kept busy by her family, her writing and her lecturing.

# The Illustrator

The name of MIRCEA VASILIU should be familiar to Books Abridged readers—his charming drawings illustrated Miss Kimbrough's previous book, Forty Plus and Fancy Free, and also his own amusing autobiography, The Pleasure Is Mine—both of which have appeared in previous volumes of Books Abridged.

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# Chapter One

KAT WAS SITTING ON A COUCH IN A BEDROOM ON THE Crescent, the New Orleans express, at that moment pulling out of the Pennsylvania Station in New York. She was lucky. There were four others in the group and we were all standing, because on either side of Kat were piled coats and furs ranging in bulk from capes to stoles. On the floor encircling the four standees, seventeen pieces of luggage had been deposited and counted there by four porters who had brought them.

"When Lindsay and I travel," Kat said, "we have accommodations like these for the two of us."

Lindsay is Kat's husband and an important New York banker. To common folk like me, all bankers are important. But when Kat mentions her husband, no one could feel the adjective to be redundant.

Ellen turned her head away from Kat and back again. It was a movement sufficient to allow her to see the total area of our quarters. But she was happy. "It will be like boarding school again," she told us.

"That's just what it will be," was Kat's answer, and there was no mistaking the opinion Kat held of the life she, Luz and I had shared when we wore blue serge Peter Thompson uniforms at Miss Wright's. But Luz, who even in a Peter Thompson suit had been both an athlete and a soothing influence, guaranteed that in a jiffy she would have the bags stacked so we could all sit down, and added, "Don't forget, I'm getting off at Wilmington, and then there will only be four of you."

"Four adults," Kat pointed out. She was born and grew up in Boston and is given to statistics. "In two bedrooms. Two people will have to sleep in upper berths, I suppose. I've never slept in an upper berth. I don't even know how you get there."

Our train emerged from the under-river tunnel into sunlight from the cold, clear day outside that made us blink.

"Where's my shoebag?" Sophy demanded. "I hope it's right side up."

Sophy was efficient and helpful when the five of us were together at college. Her efficiency has, if anything, sharpened over the years. She at once attacked the luggage with Luz and proposed a pitch, catch and place system for each bag. As a modus operandi it was probably admirable, but in operation it came close to being annihilating. Each time the pitcher called to the catcher, "Ready?" Ellen and I, with nowhere to go that was out of their way, swayed like willows, squatted like frogs, and begged the Amazons to "Look out."

But when, with perceptible sweat, they together had lifted the last piece of luggage, a weekend case of some forty pounds, and placed it on the roof of a lavatory, stowed the coats and furs on racks above us, and in the crevices that on trains are called closets, I suppose because each has a door, we were all able to sit down.

Sophy and I were together on a seat that would later extend into a lower berth for one. Luz was beside Kat on the long couch facing Sophy and me. Ellen sat between us in the armchair of our "bedroom suite." This was the way our travel agent had identified the space he had recommended that we occupy. A bedroom suite, he had explained, was made up of two bedrooms with a partition between folded back and the whole "thrown together." I think it was his choice of the word "thrown" that had given me a word association with space, and led me to assure my friends a bedroom suite would be spacious. I was uncomfortably aware I had had a flight of fancy.

But Ellen was happy in her chair, placed where the dividing partition between the two bedrooms was wont to be. "The chair's movable," she explained, "I was so afraid it wouldn't be. It might have been riveted to the floor the way they are on boats in case of bad weather, only, of course, on trains it would be because of curves and mountains."

Kat wanted to know, she said, why Ellen should be so un-

familiar with furnishings on trains. "You've traveled a lot," she said.

Ellen agreed. "But," she explained, "when Lloyd was Dean of the Law School at MadisonWis." (Ellen, born and brought up in New York, who had previously traveled only so far West as to attend college at Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania, so loved Madison that she invariably refers to it by her own affectionate nickname of "MadisonWis.")-"we came East in the summer on the sitter-upper, of course. With three children we couldn't possibly have afforded bedrooms and things. I always gave each of the children a sedative (under the doctor's recommendation, of course, and very mild) and I took one myself so I wouldn't worry about giving a drug to them. I had no time to explore the rest of a train to see what the other accommodations were. I did say to you, Emily, remember? I hoped in a suite there would be a chair, and that it could be pulled up to the window so I could see the country. I really gave in to you about flying if I could have a chair."

I acknowledged Ellen's reminder, and the responsibility for being where we were. I had been persuasive in my own way. I doubt if there are many people with whom I have held conversation, however brief, who have not heard in the course of it my opinion of flying. My opinion of this mode of transportation is low. I am uncomfortable most of the time in a plane, and I am scared all the time. I am never relaxed. I work with the pilot, though not to his knowledge. I listen to make sure the motors are synchronizing. I have no time for the passing scene; I am watching the wings and the propellers, on the lookout for a spurt of flame or drip of oil. And I hold my breath in an effort to make myself lighter and keep the plane up. Consequently, I am tired at the end of a plane trip. But if I were asked to list the things in life that give me acute pleasure I would include eating a cold turkey drumstick, smelling leaves burning in autumn, and riding on a train; any train, anywhere, and I would put "train" at the head of the list.

So we were in a bedroom suite on The Crescent.

We saw Luz off at Wilmington, and as the train moved out leaving her waving to us on the station platform we mouthed against our window panes, like fish against the wall of an aquarium, her promise to join us in New Orleans within the week.

Immediately we were beyond sight of her, Kat and Ellen requested a nap; if, Ellen said, Sophy and I did not mind keeping quiet for a little while. And if, Kat added, there is room here where two people can lie down simultaneously.

As a train traveler I felt challenged. "I'll ring for the porter," I told them, "and ask him to lower the upper berth. There's no reason why you shouldn't each be perfectly comfortable."

Sophy didn't fancy sitting in the dark for an hour or so, and left for the club car where, she said, she could at least read.

The porter answered my ring promptly.

"Will you lower the upper berth?" I requested. "But don't make it up."

"You want the berths made up now?" he asked.

"I only want you to lower the upper berth," I repeated. "Take out the pillows, put covers on them, and give them to these ladies." I indicated Kat and Ellen.

The porter rubbed his hand back and forth over the top of his head, and there was a perceptible lapse before he spoke again. "Then you do want the beds made up so the ladies can retire?"

"Yes," I echoed and paused to gather strength, "the ladies do want to retire but . . ."

Perhaps I had raised my voice because Ellen put her hand on my arm and patted it, turning at the same time toward the porter, with the endearing, confiding smile that is characteristic. "We just want to take a nap," she explained.

Taking a key out of his pocket the porter shook his head reproachfully at me. "You didn't say you wanted just to lay down. You said 'retire.' " He looked at Kat, still seated on the couch. "Excuse me, lady," he said, "I'm afraid I'll have to disturb you."

Kat rose immediately but so did Ellen from her armchair. In

that narrow space they skimmed each other like dancers in a Virginia Reel.

"You see," Ellen began, "my friend . . ." She indicated Kat with a somewhat regal nod of the head.

The porter paused in his operations to echo it, "Likes to take a nap in the afternoon."

". . . so when my other friend," she bowed at me; the porter and I exchanged nods of acceptance of the introduction, ". . . suggested this trip I said I thought it would be wonderful; but that I would like to have a nap in the afternoon, because I've always taken one ever since I was at college. We were all at college together."

"Is that so?" The porter turned the key in the lock. He and Ellen stepped back simultaneously to allow the upper berth to be lowered into place.

I took up the narrative. I didn't want Ellen to confuse him. "The lady who got off at Wilmington is a college friend, too," I amplified. "She's going to join us later in New Orleans and another friend is going to fly from Pasadena where she lives and meet us so we'll be six. We were all at college together. That's why each of us knows what the others like."

During this recital Kat had been leafing through the pages of a magazine. Without looking up from it she interrupted. "Why don't you two tell him about our children and our grandchildren?" she suggested.

We held no further conversation, but Ellen watched him cover the pillows, place two of them on the couch below and arrange the other pair about to her liking, facing the window. He allotted a blanket to each, procured from the upper berth storehouse, and from that same source removed a ladder which he hooked to the side of the berth.

Ellen scaled the ladder nimbly, refusing the porter's proffered assistance, and he left. After that everything was quiet for an hour. I lowered the shades leaving the one beside me open enough to allow me to read, or if I bent down, look out the window. But I did neither. I drifted off into a nostalgic kind of day-

dream, remembering how it had been when we were all at college together.

How Ellen had come from the library every day at exactly a quarter to one. We'd both had a free period at that hour, but I had always studied in my room. Every day at a quarter to one Ellen had said to me, "Will you wake me for lunch?" And fifteen minutes later, she had had to be awakened from a sound sleep.

And how Kat had awed us by her double-entry bookkeeping that had made it possible for her to ascertain, and she always did ascertain, the comparative amounts, from one month to another, she had spent on stamps. She had employed this as a measurement of the intensity of her current love affair.

And how Darn, who would join us from Pasadena, had kept a schedule of college and extra-curricular activities for each of us so we always went to her to find out what we were supposed to be doing, and how she was the one who had made rounds, waking us in the morning at whatever time each had stipulated the night before.

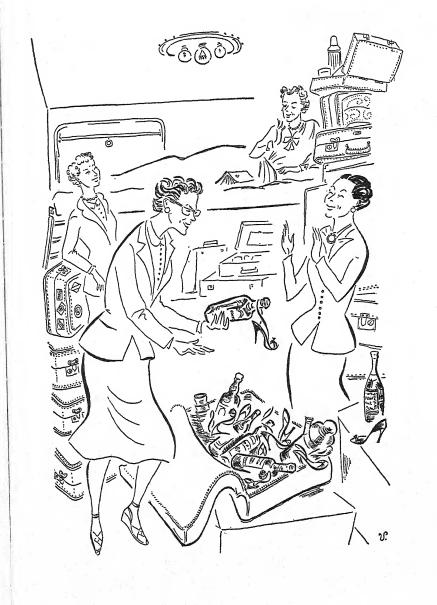
And how Luz had been the most beautiful and had the most beaux and not been able to make up her mind about any of them, nor about practically anything.

And Sophy, living nearby, had had a car and had always wanted to be helpful. Once, after a big May Day pageant she had volunteered to return to the costumers all the accounterments from the cast of *Robin Hood*, and over a bump in the heart of Philadelphia had spilled from the running board, where they supposedly had been tied, the swords, wooden staffs, doublets and hose of fifty Merry Men.

I must have dropped asleep while I was smiling happily over this recollection.

Sophy woke us all by falling over a pile of magazines and books Kat had dropped on the floor beside her bed. "I'm terribly sorry," she explained. "I was tiptoeing so as not to disturb you."

We turned on the lights and I pulled the shade beside me all



the way down. It was after six o'clock, I discovered, and dark outside.

"Where's my shoebag?" Sophy demanded, and moved toward the luggage stacks.

At the same moment, Kat rolled out of her lower and, straightening up, rapped her head smartly against the upper. "Damned bedroom *suite*," she said, feeling the top of her head, and understandably irritable. "What's in a shoebag that makes you so fussy about it?"

"Liquor," Sophy told her and went to fetch it.

As she extracted the ingredients, she explained why she had brought liquor in a shoebag. "I know there are bags made specially designed to carry these supplies. But I think it's common to carry it like that with such a purpose, if you know what I mean. I think having a drink ought to be casual and spontaneous."

No one could deny that it did look casual to see her undo the clasps of a leather valise and withdraw a bottle of gin with the strap of a sling-heel, dark-blue leather slipper around its neck. More than gin had been provided. Sophy knew and had accounted for the taste of each of us: Scotch for herself, Bourbon for Ellen, white wine and soda for me, gin and vermouth for Kat, plus cocktail shaker, strainer, mixing spoon and unbreakable glasses. And every bottle wore a garland of leather or suede.

We had dinner in our bedroom. We were a little cramped.

# Chapter Two

AFTER WE WERE PULLED INTO THE STATION AT NEW Orleans it took some time for our baggage to be unloaded onto the platform.

Standing by the pile was a young couple, their attention riveted on it. As I approached the man looked up abstractedly. But when I had stopped beside the bags he emerged from the spell the sight of them had seemed to cast over him and gave me full notice. "Are you Miss Emily Kimbrough?" he asked.

"Why, yes," I answered, "I am."

"I'm Jim Aldigé," he continued. "Sam Slate sent word you were coming. This is Mrs. Aldigé."

We exchanged how-do-you-do's, but Mrs. Aldigé added in a voice of wonder, "How many of you are there?"

"Four now," I told her, "but there will be two more. They're meeting us at the hotel."

"Six women!" Mrs. Aldigé echoed.

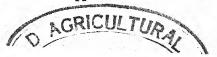
Sophy came to the rescue. "Emily," she said, "you go with Mr. and Mrs. Aldigé and take Kat with you. Ellen and I will each get a taxi, and we can manage the luggage that way."

Kat and I started to protest but Sophy forestalled us. "Go on, don't argue or we'll be here all night. Kat, you're the one to go with Emily because you've got that special message."

We accepted our assignments. When Sophy turns "general" people usually do fall into line.

In the car on the way to the hotel we talked about Sam Slate, who had been my boss at WCBS when I had had a radio program there, his official title "Head of Radio Programs," but unofficially a friend of at least one citizen in almost every town large enough to be included on a map of the United States. Mr. Aldigé added, "He's got more than one in New Orleans, and every one of them is waiting with a hearty welcome for you."

As we entered the hotel, I stepped back for a woman at the



moment entering the revolving door, and recognized Darn, our fifth member, in from Pasadena. Kat and I were astonished into inarticulate gasps of disbelief, and my introduction of the Aldigés was something less than coherent.

Mr. Aldigé suggested persuasively that he and I visit the room clerk at the desk. I agreed conversation could be continued more comfortably in our own apartment than in the lobby. Kat joined us; Darn remained near the door with Mrs. Aldigé to await the arrival of Ellen and Sophy.

As we crossed the lobby, Kat explained apologetically why she was with us. "I didn't want to interfere with your arrangements and I told Sophy I wouldn't say anything to you about it, but I might as well tell you that Lindsay wanted to make sure we were well taken care of, so he sent word from New York and I'm to check at the desk. I know you thought you were getting us de luxe accommodations on the train," she added, "but I think it's just as well my husband did take over. It will be nice to be able to move around in our rooms here."

I assured her I didn't mind in the least, but explained kindly that Lindsay really needn't have troubled because Sam Slate had written asking that we receive particular care; the head of the hotel was an old friend of his.

Mr. Aldigé broke in. "I sent a note myself," he said, "that you were coming."

At the desk the room clerk faced us across the counter. "Have you reservations?" he asked.

The three of us laughed spontaneously, and Mr. Aldigé spoke. "This is Miss Emily Kimbrough," he said, and also introduced Kat. "You're holding reservations for six. There's been quite a bit of correspondence about it," and he winked at us.

Sophy suddenly appeared beside us. She was a little breathless. "I hoped I'd catch you," she said. "I just wanted to tell you that before Luz left the train at Wilmington she showed me a telegram she'd written and was going to send from the station. She's an old friend of the manager's. She's been coming here for years. She wired him to be sure the red carpet was out for us, and that she'd be here herself soon to walk on it."

Mr. Aldigé laughed again. "Good Lord," he said, "not another. The only thing left for them to do now, I guess, is to hang out flags."

During this exchange the clerk had moved a few feet away to scrutinize a sort of bulletin board on which evidently the rooms and their tenants were posted. He turned back toward us. "What did you say the name was?" he inquired.

Mr. Aldigé gave him all the names. The clerk shook his head. "Oh yes," he said suddenly, "I've got a notice here of a reservation. Just a minute."

He opened a drawer and withdrew from it a letter. I recognized my own handwriting. "Three rooms you said you wanted," and he reread the letter rapidly. "Well, you're very lucky to have them. This is Homecoming weekend as you know."

I told him I didn't know who was coming home.

The clerk took his eyes from the letter to look at me with shocked disbelief.

"Tulane University," Mr. Aldigé interposed hastily in a low tone. "Biggest game of the year tomorrow."

I apologized to the clerk and explained even more humbly. "I understand other people have communicated with you on our behalf, and I'm very grateful. It was stupid of me in the first place not to have specified a suite with a sitting room."

"I don't know anything about any other communications," was the clerk's answer. "If there were any they probably came to the boss, and he's out of town. You've asked for three rooms and we've held them, and you're very lucky."

Kat interrupted. She was obviously shocked. "Why," she said, "my husband sent word especially that we were to have the very best."

Slowly and meticulously the clerk answered. "You've got three rooms. If you don't want them you've only to say so. I could fill them three times over in the next ten minutes."

Ellen, Darn and Mrs. Aldigé joined us in time to overhear this. We turned, all of us, to face Mr. Aldigé. He did not look happy. "I think you'd better take them," he advised. "The first thing in the morning I'll come round and see the assistant manager. He'll move you."

"Not a chance," the clerk assured him.

Mr. and Mrs. Aldigé left us at the elevator. They both seemed downcast, but we told them how much we had appreciated their coming to meet us, how kind it had been of them, how we were going to love the city and were sure we would be very comfortable in the hotel. They brightened a little and Mr. Aldigé said he would call us in the morning. He wanted, among other things, to arrange a date convenient for us to be the guests of the city on the Mayor's yacht for lunch and a trip up and down the river.

We all agreed that would be lovely and, as the elevator door closed between us, Kat called to him, "Tell that to the room clerk as you go by."

Our three rooms were neighbors to the elevator, two of them communicating. What they communicated was an over-all dreariness. The third possessed the same quality but kept to itself. Sophy and I took the one at the end. It was a corner room but it was also nearest the elevator. Darn took the middle room, Kat and Ellen shared the one to itself, beyond. Their choice, Ellen explained, was because of naps.

The temperature of our rooms must have been over eighty. It was not a remarkable idea to have the windows opened, but the bellboy vetoed it. If we did that, he said, we wouldn't get the benefit of the air conditioner.

It was my opinion that if this were benefit, the less we had of it the better off we'd be, but I allowed the bellboy to leave the room before I said so. The instant he had quitted us I opened one window but Sophy, who is a skilled mechanic, could neither open the other one blocked by the air conditioner, nor make the contraption give us any benefit. While she was struggling over

it Darn came through the connecting door and asked if we had seen our closet.

I went to the closet and opened the door. Sophy left her unsuccessful operations and followed me. The closet was perhaps twice as large as the ones on the train, but no more. On a pole across the center of it were exactly three wire hangers of no shape whatever that a hanger should have.

"Well," I said, when we had absorbed the dismal details, "maybe we can get some other hangers from the linen room."

"Never mind the hangers now," was Sophy's answer, "let's get some ice."

While she was ordering, Ellen knocked on the door and Darn let her in. She heard Sophy on the telephone and turned back immediately. "I'll get Kat," she volunteered. "This is what she needs. She's writing a telegram to Lindsay. When I left she'd torn up three."

She returned almost immediately, followed by Kat. Kat walked past Ellen across the room, turned and looked it over. "Well," she said, "so this is special attention." She underlined the word "this" by a hearty smack on the top of the air conditioner with the palm of her hand, and instantly the machine came to life with a whirring sound and a rush of cold air into the room as icy and almost as strong as a winter gale. Everybody tried to turn it off, separately and all together. But in the end we got our coats, wrapped ourselves in them and closed the other window.

The ice arrived, a table was cleared, Sophy opened her shoebag and placed on the table gin, vermouth, Scotch, Bourbon, white wine, soda, cocktail shaker, strainer, unbreakable glasses. And each bottle had a shoe around its neck. Our sommelier filled each order and then lifted her glass. "Well," she said, "we're here. We're in New Orleans."

And with our coats held tightly around us we lifted our glasses. We were in New Orleans.

We dined very well in a restaurant close by the hotel. I had

trout meunière and green salad, both delicious. Ellen and Sophy ordered as discreetly, agreeing that we would move cautiously into the gloriously rich food friends had assured us awaited us in Louisiana. But Kat, flouting such restraint, had crabmeat with a rich sauce, and when she had eaten the last morsel declared it had been succulent, and that she would now order a sweet to take away the taste of it. No one else took dessert.

Darn requested coffee from the waiter, and at the instant I had an idea that seemed to me little less than inspired. It would be fun, I thought, to walk along the French Quarter and drop in at a café. On my one previous visit to New Orleans I had been taken, I remembered, to the Old Absinthe Bar. I would lead my friends there and provide a colorful ending to our first evening. However, I didn't want to hurt our waiter's feelings by saying in his face we would go somewhere else.

Therefore, what I did was to shake my head violently at Darn, and follow this by a counterorder to the waiter. "No," I told him, "she doesn't want any coffee."

Both the waiter and Darn looked at me in startled surprise and Darn whispered to Ellen seated next to her, but I heard it. "Doesn't Emily approve of coffee?"

I was the one who answered. "Don't be silly. It has nothing to do with approving. Just don't order it."

Kat broke in impatiently. "Why on earth can't Darn have coffee if she wants it?"

Resignedly, I told my idea. The response of all of them was enthusiastic tinged with irritability.

"Why on earth didn't you say so in the first place?" was the way Kat expressed it.

Even the waiter threw in a little enthusiasm. "That is a very nice thing to do. Walk through the French Quarter and stop in somewhere."

I am sometimes discouraged by my inability ever to make subtlety pay off.

When the bill came Sophy offered an idea without subtlety. "I have a suggestion," she said. "When Emily and I were on



that trip to Italy"—the others knew of that trip—"I was the banker. Everybody put an equal amount of money into the pot and I paid all the bills. When the pot got low I collected again. We didn't quibble about who took orange juice and who had dessert, because in the over-all we felt it pretty much evened itself. And we avoided that humiliating restaurant scene of women dividing up their checks, sorting out the items, pushing money back and forth across the table trying to make even change, and everybody getting a little testy in the process."

Sophy's plan was accepted unanimously. She paid the bill and we left the restaurant in what is curiously known as "high feather." But we did not find the Old Absinthe Bar though we walked as far on Royal Street as there were lighted restaurants, and that marks a considerable distance.

We walked six blocks and then Kat and Ellen rebelled. Ellen reminded me reproachfully I had suggested a stroll, and although she had enjoyed it so far, it seemed to be turning into a trudge and she was tired. Kat agreed instantly. "Besides," she said to me, "you don't seem to know where this café is you want us to visit. Every time we come to a corner you say you're sure it's in the next block. Five corners are enough, and I don't drink coffee."

"Have fun," Ellen urged as they turned back, "but don't tell us about it until tomorrow."

Darn, Sophy and I continued down Royal Street. We came to another corner, crossed the street and started down the next block. Had we gone a block to the right we would have been on Bourbon Street, where the Absinthe House is situated. Instead we went to Chartres Street, though certainly I did not look at any street sign to learn its name then. I was searching for a pleasant place where Darn could have coffee, and I saw one on the very first corner we reached when we had gone a block along the cross street. I pointed to it. "That looks attractive," I said, "and it's so well lighted I'm sure it must be all right, if you know what I mean."

My companions did, they said. We crossed the street and entered the restaurant.

There were two rooms that we could see, the back one crosswise to the one in which we were standing. The back room was the darker but we could see it clearly enough to realize it was filled with tables and chairs and well filled with people. The first room had fewer tables and very few people. A bar ran the length of it on our left as we stood in the doorway, several bartenders and a few waiters leaning against the counter. One of these fairly leapt at us as after a minute's hesitation to get our bearings we started toward the back room. A little like a sheep dog circling and isolating individual members from the flock, he moved us back and over to the first table in the first room, only a few feet from the door through which we had just come off the street.

"This is a special table," the waiter said as he seated us. With the napkin that is always folded across a waiter's arm like an inverted sling, he gave a few flicks across the surface of the table as though to call our attention to its particular quality and then asked what we would like to have.

"Coffee?" Darn asked, looking at me for permission.

I laughed. Poor Darn and her coffee. It was nearly two hours since she'd made her first try for it. I was going to order a glass of beer. I didn't know what Sophy would choose and I had no opportunity to find out.

As I laughed, the waiter put his hands on the back of Darn's chair. "Ladies," he said, leaning toward us confidentially, "the coffee is wonderful in a restaurant not far from here. Best coffee in New Orleans. Come, I'll show you." He gently pulled Darn's chair toward him.

"Can't I have it here?" Darn asked.

The waiter put a hand under her arm and pushed her smoothly to her feet. "Come," he repeated, "I'll show you." With a hand still under her arm he led her to the door.

Sophy and I got up and followed automatically. It all seemed to me to be very sudden. But this was Southern courtesy beyond anything I had ever imagined. This would certainly be something to talk about when we got back to New York. I tried to visualize any waiter there deliberately taking business away from his own restaurant in order to make sure his customers had the very best

the city had to offer. This one took us all the way across the sidewalk to the curb, gathered us round him and pointed in the direction of our hotel.

"You keep going on this street," he said, "until you get to the big wide one with the trolleys. That's Canal. Cross that, turn one block right . . ." and he finished his directions by giving us the name of the restaurant in which we had dined. "You'll find wonderful coffee there." He beamed at each of us. "I want you should have the best," he added.

I tipped him a dollar for such courtesy and thoughtfulness. He demurred about accepting it and this behavior I classified a Popocatepetl of improbability from a New York waiter. I pressed the dollar upon him, and when he had bowed himself back to the door and disappeared through it I said to my friends, "Could you really imagine such a thing happening in New York?"

"No," Darn answered, "nor anywhere else for that matter. I'll bet it's the first time a bouncer has ever been tipped for doing his job."

"A what?" I hadn't intended to shout but I was surprised.

Darn put a hand on my arm. "Dear," she told me, "maybe that was a respectable place that likes dogs. They certainly don't like middle-aged respectable women who order coffee. We've been bounced. Have you any other suggestions?"

"Home," was my answer.

# Chapter Three

SATURDAY MORNING WAS SUNNY AND COOL, LIKE THE little bear's porridge, just right. Our equipment, carried one apiece, included a bulky but invaluable volume titled *Louisiana State Guide*. It is one of the American Guide series compiled by members of the Writers' Project in the WPA under the direction of Lyle Saxon and Edward Dryer. It is illustrated with photographs, sketches and maps. Its material is well organized, interestingly written and microscopically detailed, a really admirable job, and indispensable.

Little pamphlet guidebooks are easy to carry and very helpful. One is called *The Tourist in New Orleans*; another, *An Illustrated Guide to New Orleans*; a third, *Old New Orleans* by Stanley Clisby Arthur. All of these include maps, and although I am a shamemaking example of arrested development when it comes to reading maps, I have pored over the other contents. We used all the guidebooks on that bright, sunny morning, reading aloud sometimes separately, frequently in chorus. I daresay we were conspicuous, too; five middle-aged women, strolling, gaping and reading aloud. But happily we were of one opinion that when you are a sightseer it is a silly affectation to conceal the fact that you are sightseeing.

If it were not for the skill and courtesy of New Orleans drivers, our trip and our lives could have ended that morning. Guidebooks in hand absorbing our attention, we stepped heedlessly off curbs, wandered to the middle of the street and stopped there in order to have an unrestricted view of the exquisite iron balconies above our heads. But not one of us was grazed, though we ambled back and forth across the street without plan or warning. How could we bother about cars when at 415 Royal we must back to the middle of the street and look up, to untangle from the intricate lacework of the balcony the monogram of the original owner, Adrian Rouquette? From this spot we also saw

that the first floor was occupied by a perfume shop called René. We promptly tucked our guidebooks under our arms, crossed the street once more, entered the shop and were immediately on one of the two main avenues of particular delight to tourists: the first, sightseeing, the second, shopping.

Monsieur René is as French as a resident of Paris although his family has been listed on the records of Louisiana citizens for many generations. He himself has never been to France, but he speaks very little English. Meeting him was our introduction to the people, apart from the places, we had come to Louisiana to find: descendants of the French pioneers who, emigrating from their homeland, had chosen to subdue and live among, God knows why, the fever-ridden jungle forests, swamps, bayous and rivers that characterized Louisiana in those days. The Cajuns were French too, but settlers in Louisiana by way of far-off Acadia in Nova Scotia, driven from there by the British early in the eighteenth century. The word "Cajun" is a corruption of "Acadian."

The fact that Madame René spoke English, and I think very little French, made her no whit more American than he. But as husband and wife they provided to our pleasure an ingredient of what makes Louisiana unlike any other state in the country. Their products pleased us, too. The basic oils for his perfumes, Monsieur René told us, come from France, but he blends the scents himself according to formulae handed down to him from his forebears.

I came away with "Bayou Sauvage." I would have chosen it for the name alone but the fragrance was just to my liking. I also took with me "Toi et Moi," "Nuit et Jour" and "Jasmine," as gifts for friends. They are all inexpensive. I do not wonder that travelers who have discovered them reorder.

We lunched at the Court of the Two Sisters at 613 Royal Street. I am too simple of mind and taste to understand why the identification of a place as "touristy" is considered by some sophisticates to be derogatory. When I am a tourist I like to go to places where other tourists go. I do not mean by that that I

have enjoyment from spots that are crowded. I happen not to like crowds. But I follow the assumption that a choice of tourists is based on something about the place that pleases them. Therefore, in all probability, it will please me. The Court of the Two Sisters pleased all of us.

A broad enclosed flagstone passage leads from the street to the courtyard proper. After the brightness of the street the passageway seemed dark at first, but standing in the archway that marks its entrance, we saw that a roaring fire in a tremendous fireplace on the left was sending out the glow that was not sunlight. We passed, on our right as we moved toward the courtyard, a bar and then a beautiful broad sweeping staircase. And on the wall to our left saw the *specialités de la maison* written large on a blackboard, and paused to make note of them. Then we were in the courtyard proper, large enough for a coach and four to turn in. It runs straight through the block to Bourbon Street where there is also an entrance. The court is enclosed by a high wall, vine covered, and there are trees for shade.

We selected a table partly under one of these because the day was too cool for total shade, but too bright for sitting in the full sun. After we had ordered we read from a guidebook that the Court of the Two Sisters was built in 1832 by Zenon Cazelier when he was President of the Banque d'Orleans, and had been one of the great residences of the city, but that it had gained its present name from the fact that from 1886 to 1906, two sisters, Emma and Bertha Camors, had conducted a "fancy and variety store" there.

We lunched well and lingered over our coffee. Ellen and Kat took this opportunity to visit the Maison de Ville because they discovered a gateway through the wall on one side of our court-yard that led directly into its garden, though the proper entrance is on Toulouse Street. A friend of Kat's and mine had written us about this little place in the Quarter, urging we stay there. But at the time we had felt so much trouble had been taken about our reservations at the hotel we had not wanted to change.

The two explorers came back starry-eyed. It was completely

charming, they reported; small, beautifully furnished, intimate, and its own garden a delight. Ellen concluded ruefully, "But I think we must be practical. I don't believe the switchboard is big enough."

I am not often baffled by Ellen's conclusions. This one, however, I found too cloudy to penetrate. "Why does a switchboard have to be big?" I asked.

Ellen explained. "Well, dear, you know Kat and Darn and I have husbands, and Sophy has her Urban League and you'll have people calling probably wanting to show you things. I think it's too much for one little switchboard and one little operator and nobody there at night at all."

Sophy said no matter who had a husband, or whatever, we all had seventeen pieces of luggage, and that was too much to move. She added darkly, "And you know who'll be doing the moving. The three of you will be drifting around sightseeing and Darn and I will be left heaving the bags."

We decided to stay where we were.

On Monday afternoon at three o'clock we were in a station wagon leaving New Orleans and heading west for Napoleonville, seventy miles away. Our objective had been determined by way of *The Saturday Review*. A month before when we had been vaguely talking about the trip, Sophy had come upon an advertisement in that publication and had read it to me.

"Open All Year," it had said, "Mr. and Mrs. Edward Munson, Glenwood Plantation House, an historic ancestral home located in romantic Acadian country." The address was Napoleonville, Louisiana.

It was the first clipping that went into a folder I had marked "Louisiana Trip?" with a large question mark. The folder was bulging now, but the first clipping was still out in front.

Getting away from New Orleans had not been all peaches and cream. First of all we had had to hire a station wagon, the only vehicle that could accommodate, comfortably, all of us. Sophy, self-nominated but unanimously elected, had taken on this as-

signment. She had also proposed herself as the driver, with no changing about, and had carried that election, too.

Our road out of New Orleans took us over the imposing Huey Long Bridge, and then we were on the highway. Darn at once began to read aloud from the WPA book, *The Louisiana State Guide*. For a little while we doubted the accuracy of that excellent volume until we discovered that 411, which we were following, had New Orleans as its destination rather than its beginning. Therefore, for us, it must be read backward.

Our spirits rose high and so did our voices. "We're off to see the wizard, the wonderful wizard of Oz," we sang. Not one of our offspring was there to say, "Oh, mother." We could be as young as we felt.

Suddenly I broke off and pointed out the window to my right. "Girls," I said (we use this term to one another when our children are not around), "girls, look! That's the levee. We're riding along beside the levee of the Mississippi River."

Without being asked, Sophy drew the car to the side of the road and stopped. Darn left off reading the guidebook; we all climbed out of the car and up the bank that rose from the highway. It was a grassy bank, but the grass was brown at this time of the year. The climb was fairly steep, but the top flattened out as broad as a country road. Standing there we looked down and across the wide, yellow Mississippi. We saw a foolish little ferry-boat come toward us and watched a capacity load disembark at a landing—its capacity about twenty people and two cars.

When we had seen the arrival successfully accomplished we returned to our own car. Sophy pulled onto the highway again and Darn resumed her reading of the guidebook in time to warn us that we were approaching the Locke Breaux Live Oak, a sight that would be well worth our slowing down to see. It would be difficult to pass by without noticing this magnificent landmark. It is a few miles beyond the little village of Hahnville and is itself on the grounds of the Southern Dairy Company, a property formely owned by a Mr. Samuel Locke Breaux of New Orleans.

The guidebook says it was his interest in the tree that first brought it into prominence. I do not believe that proud ancient needed the interest of Mr. Breaux. It dominates the surrounding landscape by its own immensity and the beauty of its symmetry and rich foliage. The lowest branches, curving down, sweep the ground, and its top ones, so the guidebook says, are seventy-five feet above.

Our next stop was at Oak Alley, and though it is open to the public we were somewhat reluctantly admitted because we arrived just before five, which is closing time. We might have rung the doorbell earlier had we not stayed so long transfixed by the alley of live oaks that gives the plantation its name. This double row of glorious trees marches from the road that runs along the levee straight to the wide steps and the center columns of the beautiful house itself. This is not the entrance, however, but it is the first view one has, through a tall, iron fence, of the straight alley of astonishing trees and, at its far end, massive Doric columns. The house itself is in Greek Revival architecture, of plaster-covered brick, and not white as one might have expected, but a delicate pink. There are two galleries one above the other, and they do not run only across the front, but surround the house. These are details. The glory that is Oak Alley is the alley itself, twenty-eight oaks in double line, pointing up to twentyeight Doric columns. The driveway a little beyond the alley proper leads circuitously to the door by which one actually enters.

The owner of Oak Alley was not at home, but a maid who was also a qualified guide by virtue of her wealth of information took us over the house. The rooms are beautiful but I would count it sufficient treasure to look again and again just at the Oak Alley and the pale pillars at its far end.

If I had not walked around to the front of the house for a last look down the alley toward the river, the remainder of the afternoon, and there was not much left, might have passed uneventfully. But leave Sophy for more than five minutes in a car alone with a map, and she will have found a short cut. The others



Vasilie

had gone with me for a last look and Sophy had been left alone. We could not have been gone more than six minutes. But when we returned to the car, Sophy had a finger on the open map, a gleam in her eye, and I knew what both meant.

"Look here," she said, "just let me show you what I've found."

Kat, Ellen and Darn looked. They are obliging people. It would not have done anyone any good for me to look. In the first place I can't read a map, and in the second place no one can dissuade Sophy from a short cut. I heard her explain, as she pointed with her finger, that we had to retrace our steps a few miles anyway to Vacherie, because, while we were romantically looking at a view, she had learned from a man working in the Oak Alley grounds the road beyond was under repair and our best way to Napoleonville was back by way of Vacherie.

Having established that, without any room for argument, she continued. "Now look. La. Highway 20 is the route indicated all the way down to Thibodaux, then up again to Napoleon-ville. You can see for yourself it makes a V."

They agreed it did make a V.

"Well then," she went on, fairly shouting with excitement, "I'm sure I can cut across and pick up Route 1 without going all the way down to Thibodaux."

Her little chorus of three nodded their respective heads and that was all she needed.

"All right," she said, "if you think that's the best thing to do," and that was a silly statement if ever I heard one, "let's get going."

Where we went I shall never know. I only pray not to pass that way again. Either evening comes on more suddenly in that part of the country than in ours, or we had been so preoccupied with pillars, galleries and other beauties we had not been aware of its approach. This was no misty twilight; this was Stygian blackness through which we traveled.

Sophy has since maintained I was the only one of the group to display irritability. The others, she says, were serene because they had confidence in her. My answer has been, and remains, that they have not taken as many short cuts with her as I have been led into. My contention is, furthermore, that I did not display irritability. On the contrary, I scarcely spoke at all. I may have murmured once in a while, "You and your short cuts." And I do remember that at one time I insisted we were not on a road at all because I had a definite sensation of riding over stubble and that probably we were going right through a sugar-cane field. Although Sophy insists this was not so, I still see no reason why it might not have been.

In the distance we could see a red glow that lighted up black chimneys beneath it. Since we had been told we were to go through sugar-cane country and that this was the grinding season when the mills grind night and day, what we could see was obviously a sugar mill in operation grinding sugar cane from the surrounding country, including a supply recently taken, I asserted, from the ground we were traveling over. We passed tremendous horse-drawn carts piled high with cane. The carts themselves were like outsized, loose-woven wicker hoppers such as one sees in France. These loomed up in the darkness unexpectedly. Once we passed perhaps ten or twelve of them moving slowly in close line.

It was not more than ten minutes after Sophy had maneuvered around this procession that suddenly we were on a highway, a highway that at that very point of intersection displayed a large sign bearing the route number 1, the very highway Sophy had said we would find. She was, I felt, and said, offensively smug about what I considered entirely a chance meeting. The others, who had been dozing, roused and congratulated her with repeated cries of admiration and praise.

In another fifteen minutes we saw ahead of us another sign, this time not the designation of a route but the identification of Glenwood Plantation House, a few yards ahead and on our left. We turned in the driveway and as we moved toward the house proper we could see, even in the darkness, the outline of trees over wide lawns—outlines of such size they could only be live oaks. We stopped at a doorway under a porte-cochere and, at the sound of our wheels on the gravel drive, the door opened,

two large dogs rushed out immediately followed by a tall, slender man with a toy fox terrier at his heels, and a very diminutive lady at his side.

These were our hosts, Mr. and Mrs. Munson. They led us up a stairway to a broad hall on the floor above with open doors along either side of it. Each room into which we peeked had a particular charm, and each one to our surprise and pleasure had its own bath.

Mrs. Munson suggested we might come down to dinner as soon as we had freshened up, but Sophy asked if we might have a half hour's leeway because, she explained, "There are some things I want to take out of my shoebag."

After dining we went out with Mr. Munson to see a sugar mill working at night. As we drove the four or five miles to the mill, Mr. Munson told us something of the history of the sugarcane region; how once all the land had belonged to individual plantation owners, each plantation not less than a thousand acres, and how each owner had ground his own cane. But in 1927 bad floods had come that had ruined their crops, and before any had recovered, the Depression, like the flood, had engulfed them. That was the end of the big land holdings. Men like Mr. Munson, whose grandfather, coming from Massachusetts in 1820, had bought Glenwood Plantation, had had to sell their acres or had lost them to the bank. Now the individual holdings were small, but the co-operative mills were flourishing.

I asked why the mills operated at night and Mr. Munson explained that the grinding season is a short one, three months at best. It would close at Christmastime. The cane must be harvested and ground before the first freeze, not because of the freeze itself but the inevitable after-thaw that would rot the crop. Accordingly, for those three months the mills never stop.

Long before we reached the mill we could see a glow in the sky from the furnaces. I have seen that glow in South Chicago where the steel mills are and thought it nothing remarkable. But at Bayou Lafourche it was a remarkable and an incongruous sight. Here was an industrial plant in the center of fields of sugar cane in a flat countryside. No little town was disclosed by its glow, no sign of any commerce; not even streets with houses and people sleeping in them; only the narrow country road on which we traveled, vividly white against the monotone of the fields. These roads are topped with crushed shells.

In the last half mile along the road with us was a line of wagons such as we had seen on our short cut, each piled to overflowing with stalks of sugar cane.

"They're waiting to be weighed," Mr. Munson explained, as we eased past them. "Every man has his load weighed as it goes in. That's what determines his share of the profits."

At this distance, and we were almost at the end of our trip, we first caught the smell. But if there were no sight of, nor sound from the mill, the smell would indicate its whereabouts. I grew up in Chicago, I know what a hot summer breeze from the west can bring from the stockyards. But this is more enveloping because it is heavier and sweet, too sweet, yet overlaid with a sourness of fermentation; but within five minutes or so of our first sensing it, we became accustomed and oblivious to it.

Mr. Munson parked the car in an enclosed yard that encircled the plant. The entrance to the building is at the top of a flight of stairs. Pausing there a minute to look back over the way we had come, I saw below me, on the side of the mill opposite the entrance we had used, a single railroad track, and on this, under a sort of porte-cochere, a freight car. A moment before I had felt far away from the things I knew, both in place and in time; in a place where the air was heavy with fermented sweetness, and the only people in an empty countryside driving wagons of another day, and even country, and speaking when we had hailed them a French that has not been spoken in France since the eighteenth century. And now I was looking down at a freight car loading the product that the roaring, bounding machinery on the other side of the doorway on which I stood was preparing.

We walked along narrow galleries, went up and down stairs

from one level to another, looked over a gallery rail down into a great cauldron where a coarse, thick sugar substance moved sluggishly around and around. We saw cane syrup, heavy and dark, bubbling in a vat, and as we left we saw pouring into the freight car sugar that was granulated now, but still, even after the washing processes we had seen, carried something of the earth in its yellow clay color.

Mr. Munson reached into the chute that was carrying it and took enough to drop into my hand. It didn't sift from his hand to mine. It was a solid mass, sticky to feel, and it melted slowly on my tongue. I asked where it was being taken.

"Why, to a refinery," Mr. Munson told me.

"In a city, I suppose?"

"Oh certainly," he answered. "That's where the refineries are."

"Well, that's how it is, I guess," I said, and couldn't explain what I meant; seeing in my mind women with little fingers quirked, holding teacups and saying, "One lump, please," and feeling a silly pang that this strong, earthy substance must be refined.



# Chapter Four

The NEXT MORNING MR. MUNSON SAID HE HAD A PLAN, if that was agreeable to the ladies. At the word "plan" Kat turned on him a smile of such dazzling approval the dear man blinked a few times and turned a little pink.

Mrs. Munson spoke for him. "You were saying last night," she told us, "you were anxious to see real Cajun country, and this is it. So we thought Edward would drive you to some back country around Little Grand Bayou. It's pretty and you could meet some of the people, too."

We were off within the half hour, Mr. Munson at the wheel. He began to tell us about the country and the people in it as he turned the car off the highway onto a shell road. "We're going over to Little Grand Bayou," he said, "back of the village Brûlée St. Vincent. Our plantation, you know, is on Bayou Lafourche. That's a big one; it goes 105 miles."

Ellen wanted to know if he had traveled much on it.

Mr. Munson laughed happily at this question. "Traveled much," he repeated. "Well, I'd certainly like a nickel for every time I've gone up and down that bayou. When I was a boy it was the highway for us. That was the way we went to New Orleans, and we went frequently. Always went to New Orleans on the steamboat. Of course we never knew how long it was going to take to get there, but you could count on its being at least a day and a night, because we'd stop at pretty nearly every plantation, loading and unloading. We knew all the captains, of course, and the captain would always come up and pay his respects when the boat docked, or sometimes he'd send up a present. Once, I remember we were having dinner—we had it in the middle of the day of course, at half past one—I'll never forget that particular dinner because right in the middle of it two deckhands came in carrying a huge cooked redfish. They

brought it to my father right at the table, with the compliments of the captain."

Presently we were at Little Grand Bayou. The vegetation and woods were thick on either side of the water, except for a clearing where little shacks stood, and there were not many of these. Water hyacinths covered the surface of the water in big floating patches. There were few blooms but the leaves were bright and shining green. Along the banks we saw the twisted knees of giant cypresses, and from the branches above, Spanish moss trailed and swung a little in a light breeze.

We left the car and walked along the bank saying "Bonjour" as we passed to a man who was painting his shack, built like a houseboat, and perhaps it was one. But that morning it was wedged so well into the side of the bank it looked to me to be permanently there. It had a jaunty look, tilted a little into the bank, and it was freshly painted, white with green trimming. A plank wide enough to walk carefully on, from its front door to the road, spanned a little branch of the bayou. I would not have chosen for mine any of the other dwellings. There were not more than half a dozen of these all told. None was painted. They were all above ground on stilts and could not have contained more than two rooms, but since the door to each one was open we could see inside as we strolled along, and they were shining clean; not a rug on a floor, but the floors scrubbed until they were almost white.

At one of the shacks an old lady leaned out the window watching our approach. She rested her arms on a shelf just outside the window sill. Mr. Munson told us this shelf is called a tablette, that it's found outside almost every Cajun house and has a definite purpose. A dishpan is placed on it and the dishes are washed there through the open window. When that operation is completed the dishpan is tilted and emptied onto the ground below, so that the tiniest food scrapings removed in the washing can be picked up by the chickens. "That is how thrifty the Cajuns are," said Mr. Munson.

I asked how they made a living.

"Fishing," he answered, "trapping and harvesting cane, in the season. And they do well, too, on the Spanish moss."

"Great heavens," I asked, startled, "is it good to eat?"

Mr. Munson shook his head at such ignorance. "Lord no," he said. "They pull it and dry it and then they sell it for stuffing. A good deal of upholstered furniture, not perhaps the most expensive kind, but the great bulk of it, includes Spanish moss in the stuffing."

We came to the end of the row of little shacks; it was not long. We turned back, walking slowly along the grass-fringed bank of the bayou. The sun was warm on our backs, there was not a sound except our own voices and once a shiver of wings as we saw a big blue heron rise up from the water's edge on the opposite bank.

Driving back to Napoleonville, Mr. Munson resumed talking about the Cajuns. "They're provident, they're thrifty and wondeful housekeepers. They don't give a rap for show. You notice how dilapidated those shacks looked on the outside."

"But how spotless they were inside," Ellen put in.

Mr. Munson agreed. "And under that spotless mattress I'd be willing to bet there's a sockful of money. You never hear of a Cajun having to let go his house or his property. It may not look like much but it's his.

"But don't get the idea that it's all work for them. Not a bit of it. As I said, it's fun first. Saturday, for instance, they don't work, they're getting ready for the dance, for the fais do do. That's what they call them."

"Why," Sophy interrupted, "that's the old nursery song. 'Fais do do.' Go to sleep."

Mr. Munson threw back his head, gave a roar of laughter and very nearly ran us off the road. Swerving back into the lane he said, "Well, it's no go-to-sleep nursery rhyme here, I can tell you. It's a dance that lasts all night. They have them once a week anyway, sometimes twice. Sunday night's a big night for them, too. They start early and they dance the night through. Old and young. They bring the babies and put them on the

floor under the benches. There's a row of benches that goes all the way around the dance hall. Of course during the grinding they give up the dances because so many of the men are working all night. But even during that season they'll maybe have a few. A Cajun's not going to give up his fun, no matter how hard he's working."

When we were back on the main highway, nearing Glenwood, Mr. Munson asked if we would permit him to teach us a few things we really ought to know. We assured him we'd be grateful.

"Well," he said and was obviously relieved. "You don't know how it pains us when you all come down here and talk about beautiful camellias. It isn't camellias as in 'meet,' it's camellias as in 'met.' And please don't say 'pecan.' It's pecahn."

"Anything else we say wrong?" Sophy inquired.

"You're sure you don't mind my telling you?" Mr. Munson repeated.

His inherent courtesy and his discomfort at our blunders were having a hard time with each other, but we urged him to tell more.

"All right. Here goes. I know it's spelled 'crayfish,' " he said patiently, "but we call it 'crawfish.' I can't tell you why, but that's how it is."

"I've written all this down," Darn said as we got out of the car at Glenwood, "and we'll practice."

"I do thank you, ladies," was Mr. Munson's fervent answer. Mrs. Munson came on the little porch to welcome us back and asked us where we'd gone.

"To Brûlée," I told her.

Mr. Munson, who had at that instant climbed out of the car, sank back in his seat again, clapped his hand to his head and shook it woefully. "No, no," he said, "excuse me once more, but every settlement is called a *brûlée*; that means a clearing. The one we went to was Brûlée St. Vincent."

We had no further instructions, not I'm sure because there



were no other blunders to correct, but solely because we had no more time. We had to be on our way again back to New Orleans.

The Houmas House near the little village of Burnside is not open to the public but thanks to the intercession of Mr. and Mrs. Munson we were allowed to visit it. Its owner has donated years to a patient and meticulous work of restoration, and so we saw it very much structurally as it had been in the great days. The house itself is of two sections, the back very old with low ceilings, the front in the later period of lofty ceilings and large rooms, with one of the most beautiful spiral staircases I have seen. In the garden there is a gay little pigeonnier, and the house itself is flanked by a garçonnière on either side.

In spite of our frequent and long pauses including lunch at a roadside restaurant, we were back at our hotel in good time to unpack, settle in and even rest, before dinner.

We dined at Commander's Restaurant out near the Garden District and very popular there. Picking up my menu, and with a knowing smile at my friends, I began my order. "I'll have crawfish bisque," I said to the waitress.

And she answered, "You mean crayfish?"

Out of the whole of New Orleans my first oral exposure of my new knowledge was to a waitress who came from Brooklyn.

# Chapter Five

WE HAD RETURNED FROM NAPOLEONVILLE BECAUSE OF our engagement to lunch on *The Good Neighbor*, the boat belonging to the Port Authority, but generally referred to as the Mayor's Yacht, because during his term of office he is its host.

The Good Neighbor is by no means the only way to see the river. Scheduled boats go every day and most of them more than once a day, across the river, down to the mouth of the Mississippi to Grand Isle. There are almost innumerable excursions available. I am only sorry that time limited us to only one. But it was truly fascinating.

A yacht is not for me a customary method of transportation. At any time it would seem to me both a novel and de luxe conveyance. But after the days we had trudged the streets of New Orleans, guidebooks in our hands and perspiration on our foreheads, *The Good Neighbor* was for me as dreamlike as Cleopatra's barge. In the first place we didn't walk a step; we sat comfortably in the stern where a delectable lunch was served us. Furthermore, no one had to read from the guidebook; there were people around us who pointed out and explained every passing sight. Mrs. Morrison, the wife of the Mayor, was our hostess, and among the guests some we by now counted friends.

The sights themselves did not require pointing to catch our attention. They are dramatic: ships from every part of the world coming up the river or on their way down to its mouth and out to sea; and along the docks ships loading and unloading, drawn up in close single file in beautiful parade formation, bearing the names and the flags of Japan, Norway, Holland, Sweden, Liberia and many more.

What was pointed out to us was the reason for this dramatic formation. The river is so deep boats can stand alongside the docks without piers, and one of the advantages, and I don't suppose it was done purely for the effective picture it makes, is

that when a ship is loading and there is perhaps a delay for cargo, or possibly another ship is coming in, the one already berthed simply moves up in the line and later backs to its place again, without any unwieldy maneuvering in and out.

The unloading of bananas was a sight to see. Lifted high in the air on a sort of conveyor belt they looked as though they were riding on a giant ferris wheel. I had never before seen more bananas at one time than hang in a grocery store. The ratio of that to the amount I saw swaying high in the bright sunlight above the Mississippi that morning was approximately as an acorn to an oak tree.

I said this to Mr. Baldwin, one of the guests in the party, and he nodded his head. "Well," he said, "you're not so far off. Those belt conveyors carry two thousand bunches of bananas an hour. That's an awful lot of bananas."

I asked where the conveyors took them, into a storage plant of some sort, I supposed.

Mr. Baldwin said no, they were loaded direct onto freight cars. "They start those cars going north right away, and they send word ahead banana cars are coming. Merchants in different cities come down to the railroad yards and take off as much as they want. They end up in Chicago, and a commission merchant there takes what's left."

Kat said she supposed being a river, the Mississippi was easily navigable, not so complicated as coming into New York harbor where special pilots were required.

I have often noticed, probably because I was born in the Middle West, that people from the East are prone to consider things and people west of the Hudson simple.

Several of the New Orleans folk around us answered simultaneously, one or two of them a little derisively, "I'll have you know," was the theme of their collective answers, "that the mouth of the Mississippi is just about as tricky a spot as a sailor can find anywhere. That's because of the constant shifting of silt. Now you folks in New York can bring ships in with only one additional pilot. Down here it takes two: one the bar pilot

and then the river pilot, the bar pilot to get a boat through the mouth and the river pilot to take over. And what's more each one of those is such a special job they can't be traded back and forth. Why, this is something so special it's handed down from generation to generation—bar pilot to bar pilot, river pilot to river pilot. And they don't cross over. No sir!"

We met more river traffic on the way back than we had encountered earlier, and from the fine, spirited tootings that put a stop to conversation, I doubt there was a boat along our path that did not send us greeting. I was highly gratified by this recognition and pantomimed I would be happy to wave or bow a response but Ellen and Kat by stern gestures of disapproval forbade it. Born in the East they have a restricted behavior pattern.

Back at the hotel we packed our overnight bags and within an hour were in our own station wagon, on our way to a house in the country. This excursion was a mistake! We saw interesting countryside, unlike any we had seen before. We saw tupelo trees and "poorwill" birds and pelicans riding lovely, deep blue water, and that was that.

# ADVICE TO WOMEN TRAVELERS TRAVELING WITH OTHER WOMEN

1. Be a member of the group, not a leader.

2. Do not persuade the rest of them to do something you think they would enjoy.

3. Do not assure them they have been invited to a party just as much as you, when they doubt it.

4. Do not guarantee they will have a wonderful time.

5. Do not operate on the assumption that an extra exuberance on your part will bring together an individual who is your friend and giving the party, and your friends you have brought along.

6. Do not operate on the principle that the stranger who is giving the party is going to be captivated by your anecdotes of the killing things that happened when the members of your group were at school and college together.

7. Do not entertain for a moment the idiotic belief that start-

ing a discussion is a good idea. It starts an argument.

8. Do not reproach your friends for not making it the jolly oc-

casion you had anticipated. They will begin by pointing out your obtuseness in including them in the first place and before they finish they will have enumerated a good many other shortcomings they have observed in you.

9. When the episode is over, do not refer to it again until at least a week after returning from the whole trip. And even then,

be careful.



These rules are indispensable when a gentleman is involved. If there is no such involvement they are not worth noticing.

We arrived back in New Orleans in time for lunch. The drive was uninterrupted by sightseeing or conversation. At our hotel, the clerk at the desk told us a lady had arrived, asked for us, and been given a room alongside ours just as we'd asked.

"It's Luz," we said. I added it was the only thing we'd been together on since we'd left New Orleans the day before. Sophy's answer was unqualified. "Thanks to you," she said. I made no further observation.

When we beat noisily on Luz's door, however, we were all talking, welcoming her, and she was answering from the other side. Within a few minutes, and still talking, we were on our way to lunch at an oyster bar.

More sightseeing again: reading, looking, pointing, exclaiming, so enjoying it we protested vehemently Darn's assertion we had barely time to get back to the hotel, freshen up a little and arrive at the hour we'd been asked for cocktails by a friend of Luz's. It was, of course, characteristic of Darn to be conscious of the passage of time.

On our way to the cocktail party as we left the elevator in our hotel and rounded a corner into the lobby proper, I heard a voice and stopped, restraining the others, too. "Girls," I said (if I may be forgiven the expression), "I haven't heard that voice in five years, but I'll bet you anything you like it's my friend Emma Michie."

We hurried on around the corner and there at the hotel desk stood Emma Michie, all six handsome wonderful feet of her. She had been my hostess and become my friend five years earlier when on a speaking tour I had stayed at the hotel she then owned in Lake Charles. It had been that visit that had nagged me ever since to make the trip now being so richly fulfilled. I had written Emma we would come to Lake Charles and here she was in New Orleans.

"Emma," I shouted, and ran forward to be caught in an embrace that very nearly lifted me off my feet. I recognized another woman standing beside her. At the first sight of Emma anyone in her vicinity is not immediately noticed. "Why," I said, "I remember you in Lake Charles." But I could not at the instant think of her name.

Emma gave me an affectionate nudge in my back. "It's Clara Gebson and she's come with me to take over. How are you going to see our country without someone that knows it showing it to you? So a friend of mine has given us his house down at Grand Isle, that's one of the places we're taking you. You can stay there as long as you like. It's right on the Gulf. His cook's all ready to fix you the best food you've ever tasted. Now Williemel's going with us too, because you know she lives in New Orleans but she's lived mostly in Thibodaux and around those parts."

"Whom did you say?" I asked.

"Williemel. Williemel Howell. She's a friend of mine, so I called her up and told her we need her bad. She said she'd just love to come. We'll pick her up in the morning. You going to be ready to go tomorrow morning?"

My friends seemed incapable of speech, but I answered we would indeed be ready. I had begun to grasp the general outline of what we were about to do, but I was relieved to see Darn quietly open her bag, take out notebook and pencil and write down swiftly as Emma talked such specific data as were included.

"Grand Isle first, then back to the country around Thibodaux and Houma and St. Martinville, New Iberia, Lafayette—Rosa's going to be waiting for us in New Iberia."

"I'll explain Rosa later," I interjected to my friends.

"And then after a while we're going to get to Lake Charles." "Emma," I broke in firmly, "this is wonderful, but you'll have to give us some details."

"Details?" Emma looked at me blankly.

Sophy took advantage of my momentary dam across Emma's speech. "Wouldn't Napoleonville make a good center base for all those places except Grand Isle?" Sophy first, last and always is a map reader.

Mrs. Michie agreed it might be, and would have broken through the dam, but Sophy can be persistent.

"Then what do you say we go back there, stay with the Munsons we enjoyed so much, and make that a kind of springboard for some of these other excursions?"

"Anything you say, girls. Anything you say," was Emma's generous endorsement. "We just want you to have the best old time in the world, whatever way you get it. Now are you happy here in the hotel? Of course you are. You got a big handsome suite like mine?"

Happily, she did not wait for an answer, but called out suddenly to a gentleman approaching her though still quite a little distance away. "Well, hello, hello, I was just going to call you up to tell you I was here. Bless your heart. I guess probably you

heard me without me going to the telephone. Come on over here and say hello to these beautiful ladies. But I guess you know 'em all right well by now."

At our obvious mutual lack of recognition, she stared from us to the gentleman who by now had reached and embraced Emma. "Why for heaven's sake, girls, don't you know this man is the manager of this very hotel you're staying in? Why he's the most fascinating man in New Orleans. He's an old friend of mine. I love him to death, I do."

"I've been out of town," he told Emma, and, on hearing our names, "I'm extremely sorry I wasn't here when you came. I just got back. Is there anything I can do for you?"

"Give 'em the best suite you got," Emma interposed.

We checked that instantly and conveyed to the manager we were settled in where we were, and had actually been offered a suite some time after our arrival, but because we were not spending any considerable time had preferred not to change.

"Well, is there anything I can do then?" the manager persisted.

"Yes," I told him, "coat hangers. We've been begging for them ever since we arrived, but we don't seem to be able to attract anyone's attention."

It was not very polite of me, I'm afraid, but it was effective. A few hours later when we had returned from cocktails and dinner, three dozen coat hangers were in my room with the compliments of the manager.

Sophy organized our days from the notes Darn had taken on Emma's proposed and certainly rambling odyssey. Consulting together, Sophy, the executive, and Darn, by now conceded to be her deputy, set Saturday as the night for our arrival in Napoleonville. I put in a call to the Munsons at once. The operator said she would ring me back; there was a little trouble with cutoffs at the moment. She asked my name and I told her. "Is that spelled Kimbreaux?" she asked. I let it go. When she told me she had my party, and a man's voice said "Hello," I plunged immediately into my story. I was afraid we'd be cut off.

"Mr. Munson," I said, "it's Emily Kimbrough and I want to tell you we now number nine—nine women strong—and we want to come back to you. We're going to move in on you on Saturday night, all nine of us. So can you make room? We'll stay two nights anyway, maybe more. I can't tell you how pleased we all of us are, and I hope you are, too."

A voice answered. It had a slightly tremulous quality, a slight stutter, too, and the accent was not Cajun. "I-I don't reckon I g-got the whole gist of this, ma'am," I heard. "You don't mean nine ladies coming here? I don't think I rightly can hear you. I don't know exactly what you want of me for nine ladies."

I said briskly, "I'm only trying to tell you I want you to put us up again."

The voice came back a little stronger, "Who going to put you up?"

"You," I repeated, "You, Mr. Munson."

"No m'am." The voice was loud, strong and firm now. "No m'am. This is Tommy talking."

"Tommy who?"

"Tommy," he answered with a shout of pride, "Tommy of Tommy's Bar. That's what I'm owner of, and I got no place in it for any lady at all. So I certainly *cannot* take care of nine."

I sent the Munsons a telegram.

# Chapter Six

We LEFT THE NEXT MORNING, TWO CARS FULL, AND though filling of the two cars at the door of the hotel did not entirely stop traffic passing, it did slow and tie it up considerably. We were finally assorted, with Clara Gebson driving Emma Michie's car, and Emma a passenger in the station wagon.

I sat beside Clara on the front seat, Mrs. Howell was with Luz in the back. Mrs. Howell had joined us in the lobby of the hotel, overnight bag in hand. I had tried to tell her as we were introduced, and my friends had endorsed my sentiments feelingly, that we were staggered by such generosity as hers, to start off on a trip putting herself to any amount of inconvenience, we were sure, in order to show total strangers her countryside. Mrs. Howell had downed all our protests. It was going to be the greatest fun for her she assured us. She just loved taking a trip on the spur of the moment. She hadn't been away for goodness knows how long, and besides she loved telling all about her part of the country, and most of all she was going to be able to tell us all about her operation. Her friends wouldn't let her talk about it any more, though she hadn't half told them how terrible it had been. Three ministers had come to pray for her, but she'd chased them all away. Only afterward when she got well she had gone round and apologized to them. "And call me Williemel," she added.

We took Route 90 to Raceland. We turned south there taking Route 308, and we were, we suddenly discovered, riding along beside the Bayou Lafourche.

I was excited. "This is what I've been talking about ever since I went to Lake Charles," I said, "I'll never forget being driven from there to a speaking date in Beaumont, Texas, and riding along the road, seeing suddenly a boat of considerable size that seemed to be floating in the middle of a meadow. I'd looked away and then back again to make sure it wasn't a mirage or an

aberration. And then I asked my companion who was driving me if that could possibly be a boat moving in a meadow. And she said it was a boat but not in a meadow, it was on a bayou, and that a bayou wasn't like a river, it didn't have steep banks approaching it, but was level with the land on either side; so if that land had high vegetation on it, you couldn't see the water from even a short distance away."

I knew as I was telling this I was conveying no remarkable information to my companions, to whom a bayou was no novelty but I wanted to say aloud my deep pleasure in the literal fulfillment of something I had so hopefully told my other friends would be as I'd remembered it.

In the very act of my saying this aloud, a piercing halloo from Sophy's horn told me they saw on the instant what I was looking at around the bend ahead of us. The shrimp fleet was coming in, moving toward us in the sunlight through meadows, and presently we could read their names, Five Daughters, Southern Belle, Two Sons, Evening Star, Only Son and more. We saw their nets festooned for drying. We saw their white hulls and bright trimmings, red, blue, green, pink and yellow.

The bayou is broad and that morning it was heavy with traffic; little tugs strutting through the water drawing a line of barges behind, large boats that bore along the hull the name of an oil company and top-heavy with cumbersome machinery.

We began looking for a restaurant then and presently saw advertisements of the Huba-Huba Café, indicating its location a few miles farther on.

"It sounds like a roadhouse to me," I said, "and I don't think we'd get very good food in such a place in the middle of the day."

Williemel disputed this. "You'll get good food in this part of the country any time of the day and pretty much anywhere. I say we chance it."

I am grateful to Williemel for more things than I could enumerate on a full page, but at the top of the list would be the Huba-Huba Café at Golden Meadows. It isn't for the food alone

I would headline it, though the shrimp gumbo we ate would justify such headlining, but for the very place itself.

We went into a room with a bare wooden floor and walls, and at the far end a bar. The proprietor, tending it, was surprised by an invasion of nine women, but too courteous to display it other than by an involuntary start as we poured in. The next instant he had come from behind the bar, and introducing himself, was pushing tables together, welcoming us in French and English.

A waiter or headwaiter in any restaurant would have quailed, I am sure, at the necessity of sorting out the orders of nine women, independent women, too, all chattering at once. But not the proprietor of this restaurant. "Take the gumbo," he said, and we did.

While we waited for lunch to come, Williemel seized the opportunity to begin the narrative of her operation. That is, she tried. But before she could so much as take us with her to the hospital, Clara and Emma distracted us by the stories of their campaigning for Governor Jones in the downfall of Huey Long—not only the meetings at which Clara or Emma had spoken, but the meetings the interpid Emma had created from a group of Cajuns gathered at a bar or in a dance hall.

"They were right confused at first," Clara said, "but pretty soon other people would come in and join them and Emma'd keep right on talking. You can't stop Emma talking, not without your putting considerable effort into it."

This I counted an understatement.

Williemel came back to us from the hospital with anecdotes about the people hereabouts and Clara and Emma gave way. This time Williemel was not talking about the Cajuns but about her friends in and around Thibodaux. We would call on "Miss" Bessie Shaeffer she promised us. Maybe she wouldn't be at home but we'd at least see her house. It was a beautiful antebellum place and had been lived in by the same family for over a hundred years. I was momentarily startled to hear her grandchildren referred to, though I know "Miss" is a courtesy title of the region.

When we had finished lunch we explored the rest of the restaurant. From where we sat we had caught a glimpse of a room beyond and sounds of voices there. We found that room to have a dance floor and also a bar at its far end. But in an alcove of the room some ten or twelve men were gathered at a big round table playing cards. We immediately asked if we might watch, and they shyly but hospitably said we might. They were shrimp men, we learned, just off their boats. They were almost all of them handsome and all of them very brown with aquiline noses, black eyes and hair.

"It's bourré they're playing," Williemel said.

One of the men, hearing her, laughed and showing startlingly white teeth said, "C'est ça. Bourré."

None of us had the faintest idea of the game so it was difficult to follow, but fun to watch. Not much money was being exchanged, mostly dimes, quarters, fifty-cent pieces; but there was a considerable amount of excitement, and such rapid speech, all of it French, of course, that we could catch only an occasional word. I could have stayed another hour or even more listening, but Williemel urged us to move along or we wouldn't reach Grand Isle before dusk.

"The way you all like to stop and look at things, I've got a feeling we just won't keep going," she said.

Williemel was right. In less than an hour after leaving the Huba-Huba Café we had drawn up to the side of the road again.

We had left the bayou and the little settlements now, and were driving through treeless country with flat meadows on either side stretching all the way to the horizon.

"Those aren't cane fields," I had said to Williemel. "What are they?"

"They're not fields at all, honey," was her answer, "they're marshes. Down here they're called *flottants*, and I can tell you they float all right. If you or I were to step out onto that land we'd be down to our waists or over our heads in a few feet. But this is the trapper's gold mine. He knows every tuft he can put his foot on."

I asked what they trapped.

"Muskrats, mostly," she said. "Louisiana catches and sells more animals to the fur industry than all the rest of the United States put together."

She interrupted herself with a sudden exclamation. "Look at that over there. Slow down, Clara." Clara obeyed instructions and Williemel, leaning forward, pushed her arm through the open window beside Clara and waved a forefinger animatedly. "You see that hump over there that looks something like a cross between a beehive and a haystack?"

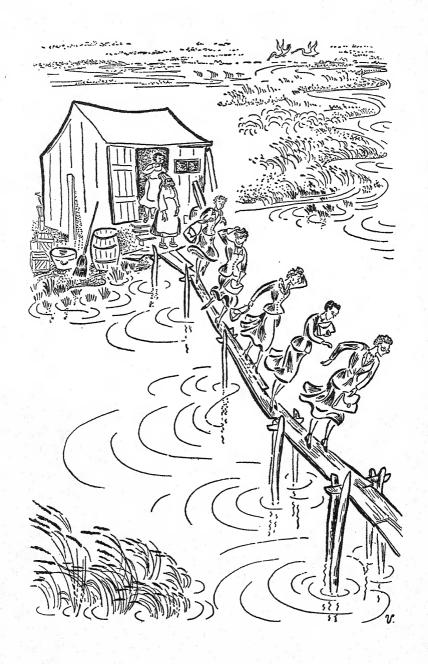
It took me a minute or two to train my eye on the center of the loops and circles her finger was describing, but suddenly I saw in that silent, monotonous stretch of marsh land a hump, bigger than, but as round as a beehive, and smaller than a hay-stack. "That's a muskrat house," she said. "It's like an apartment. It's got two stories. Isn't that wonderful? And look down there ahead," her finger made whorls again. "There's a trapper's hut. Let's go call on the people there."

A weatherbeaten shack alongside of the road was separated from it by a little bayou, bridged from the roadside to the doorstep of the shack by two wooden planks.

Two women appeared in the doorway of the little shack and eyed us with friendly curiosity. One was very old, thin and shrunken. She wore a clean but faded cotton dress and a big sunbonnet on her head. Standing beside her was a taller woman, heavy set, with brown hair and weatherbeaten tanned face.

We hadn't realized until we left the cars that a considerable wind had sprung up. We felt it standing on the road, but as we started in single file across the wooden planks, we were considerably impeded by it. It blew our skirts up and tight around us, threatened our balance, none too steady at best on those wooden planks. But all of us arrived without mishap and crowded around the threshold of the little shack.

We were welcomed with complete self-possession and dignity. The younger of the two women invited us to enter as though a visitation of this sort were an everyday occurrence.



We moved into a little room with bare floor, shining clean, an iron bedstead in one corner with beautiful patchwork quilt as a throw and spotless but coarse linen sheet turned down over the top of it. In the other corner of the room were a wooden and canvas frame and open burlap bags that held strips of material. The old lady explained that making rugs was her occupation. The younger one introduced the old lady as her mother, said her husband was a trapper out looking over the land, because the trapping season would not open for another few days, but they were getting ready for it. Her husband's name, she said, was Leon Cheramie. We introduced ourselves and she introduced her mother, Mme. Melançon.

Mme. Melançon asked if we had come from any distance. We said New York. She nodded her head. She herself had once visited a large city, Biloxi, by name, she said. She had not cared for it though the stores had been handsome. She supposed New York was like Biloxi. Very much like it, we told her.

It was a delightful visit and we told our hostesses how much we had enjoyed their hospitality. They hoped, politely, we would drop in again one day, if we happened by from New York. We assured them we would be delighted.

Presently we were on the long causeway that leads to Grand Isle, and all along this part of the country we pointed out to one another kingfishers, blue heron and white, and the ubiquitous pelican, absurd creatures that were a constant delight to me. The air was cold, the afternoon was getting on, the sky was gray and the wind blew harder. We left the causeway and we were on Grand Isle proper, narrow, with scant vegetation, not unlike the parts of the New Jersey coast I have known. Down the one main road a mile or so, and we were at the house we were to occupy. Clara blew her horn, Luz followed with a signal from hers. A man and woman came from the house, the woman smiling, waving, very stout, dressed in slacks and a blouse open at the throat. The man was small and very thin; both of them were hospitable, friendly.

They spoke no English but they shouted in French, "Go

quickly, go quickly, come back later. We take your bags. The shrimp boats are coming in. The shrimp boats are coming in!"

The shrimp boats were docked when we reached the landing. As we opened the doors of our cars we could hear a jumble of men's voices, women's too; machinery and hurrying footsteps. We ran around the corner of a long gray wooden shed that separated us from the boats and were on a wide wooden walk that edged the water. On our left through the open doors of the shed I could see women working busily at something. Immediately ahead of us, a little boy, perhaps twelve years old, was guiding and pushing great masses of shrimp with a shovel along a chute that emptied into the shed. On our right big baskets were being lowered by a crane into the hold of the boat nearest me, and returning to the surface brimming with shrimp and small pieces of ice that spilled and scattered along the walk at our feet.

I walked over to the edge and looked down where the crane was operating. I found myself looking into the upturned face of a handsome young man standing, feet wide apart, up to his knees and over in shrimp. His face was a glowing brown, his eyes were dark, his hair black and curly. He laughed at my start of astonishment. I had expected to see shrimp, but not a man kneedeep in them. His teeth were strong, white and even. He was as French in type as any fisherman bringing in his catch off the coast of Normandy.

"Bonjour," he said, and still in French, "You have come, perhaps, to see a few shrimp?"

We both laughed at that.

I told him I'd like to see everything, but at the moment I could see he was a little busy. And we laughed again. I would go watch what else was happening and perhaps I could come back a little later and talk to him. He assured me he would be delighted to receive me. This was his boat. He would like to show it all to me, and would like me to meet his wife, who was on board.



Our group had scattered. I found some of them inside the shed and joined them to watch, across a trough, a line of women. Their hands were moving so swiftly I could not, for a minute or two, discover what they were doing. The trough between them and me was the continuation of the one at which the little boy had been working, filled with running water and bits of ice. Some of the young women wore rubber gloves, others worked with their bare hands, purple from the cold water.

I thought at first the process was the separating of shrimps for size, but after keeping my attention fixed on one pair of hands, I realized they were removing the heads. The women swept into each hand a fistful of shrimp as they floated by, and with each thumb flicked off the heads, opened their hands, released those beheaded and scooped up another fistful.

I walked the length of the trough and found at the other end the shrimp being reloaded into baskets. A man was standing by the scales on which the baskets were being weighed and their weight written on a chart by two workers. He was the only one in the shed who seemed not to be working under pressure, but supervising, and I ventured to talk to him.

I asked how they knew when to get the trucks and the workers ready at the shed. Every boat, he said, was equipped with all kinds of modern engineering aids including a ship-to-shore telephone. The captains telephoned that the boats were coming in; they always came in by agreement, at the same time, so no one had advantage over another. Immediately a man on duty in the shed got the news, he didn't telephone, he didn't push a button or flash an electric signal of some sort; he ran outside and pulled the rope of a great hand bell. The sound of that bell was a signal to the village that the fleet was coming in, and from out the cottage doors the girls came running, the drivers of the trucks left their games of bourré, or whatever, and drove to the shed, and everything was in readiness when the boats sailed into view.

The workers at the scale interrupted politely to ask something about the truck loading, and I said I would not bother my informant any longer, but might I look about a little more? He

urged me to do this and to board the *Bienvenue*. It was a fine boat, he said, and pointed out the window to the one I had photographed.

On my way back through the shed I gathered up Ellen, Luz and Sophy. The others were not in sight. I told them we'd been invited to board the *Bienvenue*. We walked out to the dock and saw its name brightly painted along the bow. We climbed on board and were greeted immediately by the captain's wife, who'd been told, she said, we were coming.

She was small, pretty, as fair as he was dark, and spoke not a word of English. She had with her their son, a chubby, very blond little Cajun about six years old. He was dressed in a Roy Rogers suit. His name, his mother told us, was Pierre. Pierre Cheramie, but they called him "Beelee."

Mme. Cheramie told us her hubsand's family had been shrimp fishermen for generations. He had been in the last war and when he had got out had designed this boat and had it built by his brother-in-law. It had cost him \$47,000 but he was a hard worker and had paid it off in a year and a half. This, I thought, was hard work that paid off well. She went on to say that he averaged about \$1,200 for five days' to a week's fishing, but that of course the two men who worked with him had to be paid out of that. I still considered it a good reward for hard work.

We found the rest of our group at another shrimp boat along the line. We called them, and as they came toward us Williemel pointed to a large bag Emma was carrying, and pantomimed it was shrimp given from the boat *they* had visited.

As we were closing the doors of the station wagon, someone shouted and we looked out. Hurrying toward us was the gentleman with whom I had talked in the shed. He carried in each arm a sack of such size that each arm barely reached around it, and he was a little out of breath when he came up to us. "You must not go," he said, "without some shrimp," and held out both the bags.

He was Monsieur Brignac, the owner of the Circle Shrimp Company for which all these boats operate. He assured us he would have regretted it always had he allowed us to leave with-

out the compliments of the Circle Shrimp Company. We exchanged handshakes, and reiterating our gratitude drove off.

Darn thought it might be a good idea to bury one of the bags of shrimp before we reached the house, lest the cook, confronted with such a quantity, walk out and leave us with them. But Kat was appalled at the very thought of such waste. We were glad her opinion had been the deciding one, because the cook, though not overjoyed, did not suggest leaving. "I cook some of them," she said, "although I have prepared shrimp, of course, but these I will boil as an extra, and the rest I can put in the deep freeze."

The words "deep freeze" she said in English, and Kat observed as she got out of the car, "Thank goodness I'm beginning to understand their French."



## Chapter Seven

NEXT MORNING, WE TOOK A TOUR AROUND THE ISLAND before we returned to the mainland. The beachfront houses, we learned, were all fishing camps or cottages occupied intermittently by vacationists. The population proper lived back from the water.

A quarter of a mile or so in from the highway we came to a settlement of little cottages that were obviously for daily living, not vacationing. Grass grew back here and trees, but the trees bore evidence of wind and storm. Their shapes were twisted. In a grove of these a clearing had been made and fenced.

"I wanted you to see this," Williemel said.

Clara stopped the car. We climbed out and as we approached the clearing saw that its fence outlined a little cemetery. All around the hidden, peaceful sanctuary the gnarled, distorted branches waved and creaked, but there was no other sound except the wind itself. We didn't talk. We moved in to read the headstones and point out to one another with appreciation the exquisite wreaths and garlands made of delicately colored beads and encased in grass frames. One of these decorated almost every grave.

I noticed at each grave a partially burned candle, or the wax from one completely burned. I looked inquiringly at Williemel and pointed to them. The rest of the group joined us from the other car and Williemel talked with affection about this little place she had known for years, and to which we had paid our homage in that first few minutes of involuntary silence.

"Every year," she said, "a candle is placed and lighted at each grave on All Hallows' Eve. When other people are out playing Halloween pranks dressed up in fancy costume, the people here make a procession to this place, carrying candles. The candles are left here, as you see, and burn all night."



We crossed the causeway. Taking a last look back, I saw a two-wheeled cart roll onto the road we had just left. I couldn't see the face of the man who was driving the slow-moving otherworld vehicle, but I thought to myself as we speeded out of sight of him, "There goes the descendant of a pirate."

Williemel was talking again. "And by the way, around here there's no Fourth of July celebration. You know why? Because that's the date of the fall of Vicksburg."

Magnolia is between Houma and Thibodaux. It is the house in which "Miss" Bessie Shaeffer lives, and we stopped to call. Miss Shaeffer was in New Orleans at the opera. The very old butler who opened the door to us explained her absence. She would be highly regretful, he assured us, to have missed Mrs. Howell and the ladies accompanying her, and she would certainly want he should show us anything we might be of a fancy to see. We stood at the doorway for a moment, looking back through a grove of magnificent magnolias, by their size very old, and for which the house is named. Among them is a sort of inner grove of beautiful live oaks hung with Spanish moss.

We walked through a wide and high-ceilinged entrance hall and stopped at the foot of a beautiful rosewood staircase. On a gallery that runs the length of the back of the house we saw a series of slave bells of various sizes. The butler told us each was rung from a different room in the house and there was no mixup in the service because the bell for each room had a different tone. The kitchen was in a separate building at some little distance, the original slave quarters beyond. Our guide showed us still another separate building constructed, he said, of double brick walls with charcoal packed between. The cistern was here, and the charcoal kept the water cool.

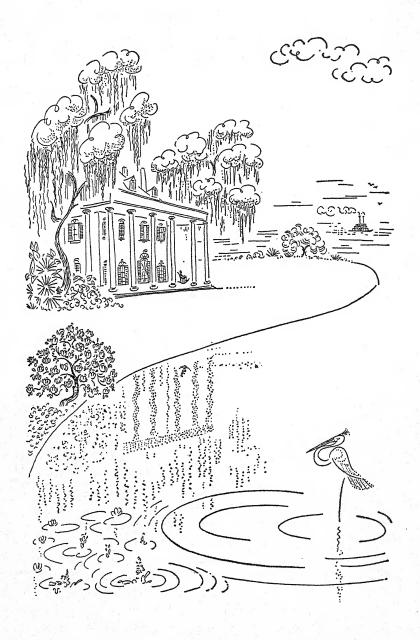
We were not permitted to leave until we had seen the rooms upstairs. "Miss Bessie would want you should," her representative told us sternly. They were high-ceilinged, generously proportioned, but they did not include Miss Bessie's own. Her bedroom suite was on the first floor, and as we came down the stairs, I asked Williemel if this was customary.

"Yes, it is," she said. "In a lot of the plantations you find mama and papa's bedroom and maybe a study or dressing room or whatever on the first floor, and the children's and the guests' rooms on the second."

As we walked toward the front door, preparing to go, she continued, "I want you to notice the plan of this house because I'm going to tell you about it later on."

We drove about Thibodaux itself and found it a charming little town. When we left and were on the final stretch to Napoleonville, Williemel settled back and began.

"Now first of all I want to tell you about the construction of these Southern houses on the big plantations. All of them have pretty much the same plan; that's a wide downstairs hall with two big rooms on each side of it. Sometimes there are more, but it's the same number on each side, and each one of those rooms has the same number of windows in it, put in exactly the same place, and there's a reason for it. I'll tell you what it is. It's so that when you open up the front door for a breeze, there's a door just like that at the end of the hall, and you open that and the breeze goes through. And the same thing goes for the windows crosswise. You open the windows on one side, you open them on the other and the breeze runs through. That's the way you keep your houses cool as possible in this climate."



I interrupted briefly to interpolate it also provided one of the most beautiful and satisfying designs of symmetry and proportions of any type of architecture.

Williemel agreed happily. "But," she added, "it's got a terrible drawback, too. You're going to hear people say, or you'll read in the guidebook, "This plantation destroyed by fire'—'This plantation had such and such a house but it was burned."

"Wasn't that the awful destruction that came in the wake of what you call the War Between the States?" I asked.

"No, it was not by any means entirely that," Williemel answered quickly and vigorously. "These houses, lots of them, have burned down by themselves. Let a fire get started, and with the windows and doors exactly corresponding to each other, the flames whip through just the way a breeze does, and a house doesn't stand a chance. You can see how far out in the country they are. Time the fire department gets there from the nearest town, it's all over."

A hysterical series of blasts from the station wagon's horn startled us all. Williemel stopped talking. In my absorption in her story I had not been viewing the passing scene. As I looked now, I recognized it. We were in Napoleonville. We were on the highway.

"Turn in," I said loudly and happily to Clara and pointed to

a driveway.

Mr. and Mrs. Munson had heard the horn. They were standing at the top of the steps under the porte-cochere, their arms outstretched to greet us. "Come in, come in," they were both calling as our cars stopped. "Welcome home."

Williemel was the first out of our car. The Munsons stared for a moment. "Williemel, Williemel," they said together, and wrapping his arms around her, Mr. Munson said to me over her shoulder, "Why, you've brought us one of our oldest friends in the world."

I wasn't surprised by this. I was beginning to take as a matter of course that everyone in Louisiana is either the oldest friend of, or kin to, very nearly everyone else.

# Chapter Eight

SUNDAY MR. HOWELL DROVE FROM NEW ORLEANS FOR lunch to gather up his "traipsin'" Williemel. He and Mr. Munson had been boyhood friends, we learned, and at lunch we sat as spellbound as children by the reminiscences between them. Mr. Howell, tall, handsome, delightful, turned out to be as good a storyteller as Williemel. I can pay no higher tribute.

He told us, at Mr. Munson's prompting, the story of his family silver, and we secured his promise to show it to us on our return to New Orleans. The silver had come by way of a Spaniard who, having settled in Mexico, had come each winter to New Orleans for the opera season. There he had met Mr. Howell's grandparents, Mr. and Mrs. Perkins, in town for the opera, too, from their plantation. They had become friends, and Mrs. Perkins had asked the Spaniard at one time to visit at the plantation. Arriving there, he had been particularly impressed by the sheep Mr. Perkins had developed from Merino stock he had imported from Spain. This was a strain long familiar to the Spaniard, and he immediately longed to take some of it back to Mexico. A transaction had been accomplished. The Spaniard traveled with his money in trunks, the trunks filled with Mexican silver dollars. He gave six thousand of these in payment for the sheep. Mr. Perkins, in a gesture certainly as handsome as ever was, made to Mrs. Perkins a present of these silver dollars. She knew exactly to what use she wished to put them. She had heard of a famous silversmith, Italian, I think, who had migrated to Havana, Cuba. He would make her a set of fine silver from the silver she would send. The Mexican dollars were shipped to him. He melted them down and began his work. It was a task that took more than one year to accomplish, and in that interim, the War Between the States burst out. Nevertheless, the silver was shipped from Havana. It got through the blockade, was smuggled up the Bayou Lafourche and delivered to the Perkinses on their plantation. They promptly buried all of it and there it stayed untouched until the end of the war.

After lunch the Howells left and Luz went with them. We were as sorry to lose Williemel as we were to let Luz go, because in the few days she had been with us Williemel had become a friend, a gay companion, a Pied Piper guide.

We were, if anything, more reconciled to Luz's going. She had warned us she might be summoned home, and Darn, from her knowledge of calendar dates, had told us why. So we had not been bowled over when a telephone call from friends in Kentucky had reached Luz in Napoleonville saying they were coming to Little Rock for the opening of the duck season and could they stay with her. Reporting this, Luz had said of course they were right in assuming she'd be there since she hadn't missed the opening of a duck season in fifteen years.

When Luz had gone with the Howells, Mrs. Munson suggested we take a little tour with her. Mr. Munson had shown us places he thought we'd find interesting. She had some favorites she'd like to share.

She drove us along the Bayou Pierre Part and showed us the house of Honoré St. Germain who was called the king of Pierre Part. His royal residence has awnings. His daughter runs the Rainbow Inn close by, and Mrs. Munson told us it's a place famous for crayfish bisque. She told us, too, about the daughter. Her father had sent her to be educated in a fashionable convent in New Orleans. She had gone obediently, had been a good student, completed her education with high standing, and had then announced to her father the only thing she wanted to do was to come back and live in the swamps by the bayou she loved. Her father bought the Rainbow Inn and set her up as proprietor.

We watched a man rowing his family in a pirogue across the Bayou Pierre Part. Mrs. Munson told us there is no road on the far side; their only outlet to other communities is by pirogues. There are many communities like that, she said, and a common expression among their inhabitants is, "Haven't been

out front lately." That means they haven't been as far as the highway along the Bayou Lafourche.

On our way back to Napoleonville, I asked Mrs. Munson to tell us about Glenwood Plantation in the old days.

She thought for a minute or two before she spoke and I knew she was living rapidly back over the years. "It was all new to me," she began, "when I came here as a bride. I grew up in New Orleans. I was a city child. I knew very little about plantation life but I loved it from the very start.

"We all lived together in the big house: my husband's brothers and their wives. Their father was dead and they ran the plantation. There weren't any highways then, I can tell you. There was only a mile and a half even of gravel road; the others were just plain mud, I called them. But Edward always used to correct me. They were soil, he said. The boys worked hard. They'd be out in the fields before daybreak and then, about seven o'clock, we girls would ride on our horses out to where they were working, and the servants would come along driving a buggy or a cart, with breakfast in it. They'd set up a table right by the field where the men were, and we'd all sit around and have a big, hot breakfast. The men would rest a little while after that and then they'd go back to work; the servants would pack up the things, and we girls would go for a ride and then back home, where there was plenty for each of us to do with the running of a big plantation.

"Then there were parties, of course, up and down the bayou at all the plantations. And we went back and forth to New Orleans in the winter after the grinding. And in the spring everybody from the plantations would get together in whatever town they were holding a sale of mules; in those days all the hauling in the fields was done by mules. We didn't have trucks, and they even used mules for some of the grinding; they didn't have the kind of machinery they have now. You paid almost as much for a good mule as you do today for a car. Fifteen hundred dollars wasn't unusual. They were shipped in mostly from Kentucky and lots of them came from around St. Louis, and wherever the sale was, all the plantation owners would gather. We'd have a

high old time. The sales lasted for several days. We'd have dances and picnics and all kinds of carryings-on. Plenty of servants; I don't really know how many people worked on the place.

"Of course they didn't have the schools then like they do now, that compulsory education we were talking about a little while ago, and you saw what it's doing. When my husband was growing up there was a tutor in every plantation for the boys, and a governess for the girls. Then when the boys got old enough they were sent, mostly up North to a university, lots of times to England; Cambridge, Oxford. Girls went abroad, too, to finish their education. Everybody traveled a lot in those days." She smiled and added, "In spite of the mud roads and slow boats. Nowadays people have highways. But people like us don't get a chance to use them much. The depression and the big floods," she broke off a minute and laughed a low quiet laugh from inner amusement, "well, they washed out our traveling. I guess you might say we were washed up."

We turned in the driveway of Glenwood and stopped under the porte-cochere. Mr. Munson came out to meet us.

"Edward," Mrs. Munson said, "entertain these ladies for a little while, will you please? Supper's going to be a little bit late. I have to see to it and I hadn't meant to be out so long."

For supper we ate boudin. That, we learned, is a dish made of pork with rice and herb seasoning; head cheese; potato salad; cold ham and a lemon pie. Mrs. Munson came from the kitchen to tell us it was ready. But after dinner she sat in the drawing room and served us café brûlot.

# Chapter Nine

THE MUNSONS SENT US ON OUR WAY TUESDAY. ALL morning we drove through cane country; men in the fields to either side of us were swinging horrifying-looking tools that looked like giant cleavers. Whatever their name, the purpose of these was unmistakable. The fields were being cleaned up to make ready for the next crop since this one had been cut and carted to the grinding mill.

In Morgan City we called on the editor of the newspaper, with whom we had a delightful conversation though he was a little irked that we were only passing through. We were even more rueful about this than he, I assured him, but we were scheduled to spend the night on Avery Island. "That," I said, "is the difficulty of a schedule. Once you've made it, you have to keep it. Next time I'll throw a schedule out the window and just drift from bayou to bayou."

We saw Avery Island long before we reached it. It rises astonishingly above the surrounding flat landscape, and by contrast to the marshes is startlingly green and wooded. The island is owned by the McIlhenny and Avery families and the McIlhennys are relatives of Kat's husband. We were indebted to Kat for our invitation to spend the night as their guests.

The Averys and the McIlhennys, who are related, have owned and lived on the island for a number of generations, but it was Mr. Edward Avery McIlhenny who made it a place travelers must visit. He died a few years ago, but during his lifetime he created and developed the bird sanctuary and the gardens, accomplishments that seem almost impossible of achievement during one man's span of years. Instead of using his knowledge of ornithology and horticulture as a basis for further research, he shared it with anyone who cares to come and see.

The bird sanctuary began as a haven for egrets. In the 1890's Mr. McIlhenny had found this exquisite bird was almost extinct.

He explored the swamps until at last he and two Negro assistants found seven young birds. He brought them home and in 1893 had a small colony for which he established the sanctuary.

When we reached the McIlhenny property, we stopped at a toll gate, but when Kat gave her name, the gatekeeper told her we were expected and were not to pay the tourists' admission fee of fifty cents per person, plus a dollar a car. The gatekeeper gave us directions for finding the Tabasco factory. He said Mr. Mc-Ilhenny was waiting for us there.

Kat told us that all the Tabasco sauce in the world is made on Avery Island by the McIlhenny Company. It takes its name from the town Tabasco, Mexico, where the pepper seeds were found. They were brought back by a United States soldier returning from the Mexican War. He had given the seeds to someone of the McIlhenny family, who, planting them, had experimented with the peppers and evolved this sauce by a recipe that is to this day a family secret, to the family's considerable profit.

We found the factory where two gentlemen were waiting. One of them was Mr. Walter McIlhenny, our host, and he introduced his nephew, Mr. Ned Simmons. Perhaps Mr. Simmons is a cousin. Long before we left the island I had become so confused between Averys and McIlhennys, and the other names they have married, I gave up trying to sort out the relationships.

Mr. McIlhenny told us Ned would show us where we were to stay and then take us to the bird sanctuary.

We were allowed no time to enjoy the guest house given over to us. We must hurry, Mr. Simmons urged. It was getting toward dusk. The birds would be coming in. Two men servants ran back and forth from the car to the house removing our bags. We followed on the run, too, flung open our bags, changed to walking shoes, threw off city furs, snatched up sweaters and topcoats, raced back to the car and climbed in.

It took only a few minutes to reach the place. I was tense with excitement, perhaps from the sense of urgency Mr. Simmons had communicated and his own anticipation.

He said to Sophy (he sat beside her), "Turn here-watch for

a curve—you can push a little now," and except when he spoke to her he had his head out the window beside him and was watching the sky. "Here we are," he told her suddenly, and added almost in a shout, "We're in time. Come along."

I did notice the car was stopped beside feathery trees because I walked among them, fast, almost running, keeping up with Mr. Simmons, who led us single file along a path. We came out of this grove at the foot of a flight of steps.

Mr. Simmons pointed up. "There's the platform," he said. And we climbed to a lookout.

The platform was large; we moved about on it easily. Twice our number would not have crowded it. We leaned on a railing that encircled it and looked down below at a lake of black water, vegetation growing in it and coming thickly down to its borders.

A few birds were on the branches of trees that fringed the water. I saw two heron standing some distance from me, and beyond them I thought I saw motion in a clump of marsh weeds.

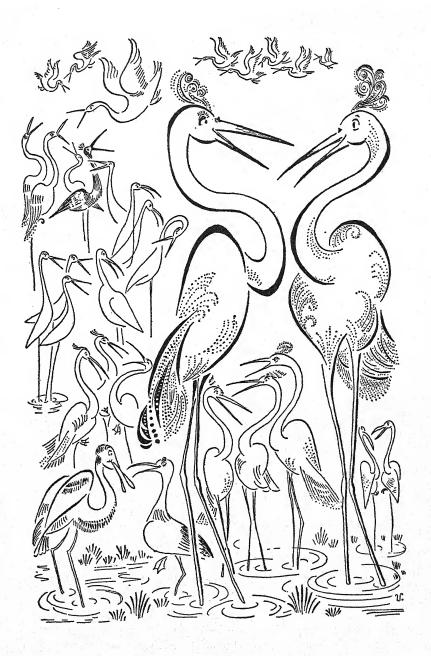
I looked up and saw two beautiful white birds coasting down toward us, without motion of their wings, or sound.

"Oh," I said, and found my voice was quavering, "the beauties. There they are, the egrets."

I watched them as they came silently to earth, but at the instant of their lighting Mr. Simmons spoke sharply, "Look up," he said. Fifty, seventy-five, a hundred, a thousand birds were above us suddenly within our view; white, blue, gray, black, large and small. They made no more sound in flight than a summer breeze through a clump of willows. But when they had landed on limbs and on shore, they began to talk, and I have heard such chatter only at a woman's club luncheon.

I want no ornithologist to identify or translate for me bird sounds. What we heard that evening was bird gossip. Newsy notes of the day, where everybody had been, whom they had seen, what they had picked up, and where the pickings had been good, or unsatisfactory.

The air above us was filled again and down they came, silently, and on the instant of arrival increased the clamor. Now



bushes and trees and water were dotted with white. I have seen tufts of cotton left on bushes after a picking. This was like that sight, except that the white tufts were of a size I could scarcely have put my two hands around, and every tuft had antennae, a little tower of delicate filaments. This was the crown, the crest of the egret.

I didn't count the number of times the sky filled, but the birds came, again and again—sometimes a small group, twenty-five or thirty, then hundreds, and now and then stragglers or independents, by ones and twos.

Through the center of the lake there is a series of platforms on stilts high above the surface of the water, like a boardwalk at a summer resort, except there are no steps by which one could reach it. Pointing to it I said to Mr. Simmons, "Evidently that was made for the birds but they don't seem to care for it."

"You should see it in the spring," was his answer. "Those are the nesting platforms, and I assure you they are crowded during the season. And I'll tell you something else you really have to see to believe. Every bird family has its own apartment, you might call it, and it's crowded as a tenement; nest to nest with no space in between. But when the parent birds come home, or the male, if the female is nesting, they make no mistake about their address. They'll come down out of the sky right straight to their own apartment, not a bit of uncertainty or scrambling about, apologizing at having got off at the wrong address. Each one goes straight to his own. In all the years I've watched them, I swear I don't know how they do it."

Darn asked how long he had been watching them and how he came to know so much about them.

Mr. Simmons grinned sheepishly. "Ever since I was big enough to climb up these steps," he said, "or maybe before. Anyway as long as I can remember. When I was a child," he explained, "for a while we didn't live on the island, but I used to spend all my vacations here. I was always crazy about the birds. I've watched them from every spot, I guess, and about every time of day or night. You never get tired of them."

I realized we had been talking because there were no birds coming in, and I looked inquiringly and a little startled at Mr. Simmons. He must have realized my sudden awareness of what was not happening, because he smiled and nodded his head. "That's right," he said, "it's all over. There may be a few late stragglers, but the respectable citizens are home for the night."

As we started down the steep stair flight, I took one last look back over the sanctuary. Twilight was close by. The blue herons were melted into a monotone of water, trees and shrubs. Only the white cotton tufts, the egrets, still gleamed out of the dim light; the pitch of chatter was lowered now to a throaty, lazy murmur and even that as I listened was fading off. As I turned again to go down the steps I had a foolish feeling of closing the door to a nursery and calling back, "Good night, children. Now settle down and no more talking." Had the stairs been not so steep I think I would have tiptoed down them.

The next morning began with a visit to the pepper fields. They spread over many acres. That morning the acres were peopled with colored women workers who moved up and down the rows of plants, picking the small, bright orange fruit. For protection from the sun, they wore bandannas of bright colors, wrapped tight around their heads. Their cotton dresses were in many colored prints. The warm sun intensified the shades in the shifting kaleidoscope. Half closing my eyes against the glare I lost the individuals and saw only a shimmering movement of color.

We traveled over the greater part of the island after we left the pepper field, and arrived in time to meet Mr. McIlhenny by appointment at the entrance to the salt mine that is another of the family's industries. We made the descent from the mouth of the mine in an elevator that swayed a little and in total impenetrable darkness. No one in our group mentioned any sense of uneasiness. No one mentioned anything. Not a word was spoken. I would not have been surprised to learn my friends, like me, were praying.

We stepped out into a vast labyrinthian underground area,

with soft white walls and high ceiling overhead, all salt of course. Mr. Jay served as our guide. He was an officer of the salt mine company to whom Mr. McIlhenny had introduced us above ground. Mr. Jay, leading the way from the elevator, put us into a jeep nearby. Our numbers necessitated an unconventional seating arrangement. For Mr. McIlhenny to be included, he was not actually in the car but straddling the hood, and assured us it was a place he frequently assumed when he was host to a group of visitors. We drove bumpily and rapidly along wide passages that turned and twisted. There was no work going on because it was the lunch hour, so that apart from the unearthly quality the soft whiteness of the walls and roof gave to the place, there was added the eeriness of total absence of sound other than of our motor and our voices. I can now say I have seen a salt mine but I was profoundly thankful to be above ground again.

We lunched at the guest house and were joined there by other members of the family: Mrs. Ringle, and Mrs. Simmons, the mother of our bird guide, Ned. If ladies in the South habitually lunch as we lunched in that part of the country, then there must be a profound difference between Northern and Southern body chemistry that allows them to maintain their slim figures. Our luncheon on Avery Island included fried chicken, broiled mushrooms on top of squares of golden brown grits, creamed spinach, grapefruit salad, hot rolls, and for dessert thin pancakes rolled around jelly and served with a rum sauce.

During lunch we learned Mrs. Simmons' specialty is cattle, and that she has a fine herd. The beginning of the herd and her occupation was a Brahman bull her father, Mr. McIlhenny, had bought in India. The bull had arrived in a hand-woven bamboo crate. Container and contents won Mrs. Simmons' heart. She feeds her bulls, she told us, three hundred loaves of bread twice a week. She buys up the stale loaves from bakeries over a considerable area.

I asked if this was a diet used by all breeders. She told me she thought it was not, but that she herself had found it highly successful.

# Chapter Jen

The figure that waved and danced on the side-walk as we drove up to the Frederick Hotel in New Iberia denies my theory of a special Southern chemistry; it is ample and it belongs to Rosa Hart, the wonderful dynamo of Lake Charles, and my friend. She was the friend of Ellen, Kat, Darn and Sophy within five minutes of their introduction. By comparison with Rosa's, Emma Michie's vitality and energy are as a lagoon to a millrace and I was thankful that my dear companions had met Emma first.

Simultaneously with the introduction of my friends to Rosa, she was introducing to us a young man who had come with her from Lake Charles and of whose name I never became sure. I know that he is a merchant seaman, that he was at that time having a holiday in Lake Charles between ships, that he is one of Rosa's many protégés, and he hopes one day to write. I think his name is Fred Smith. I call him that, and I shall be grateful to him "for keeps" as the children say, because without him and the arrangements he made, we would not have seen a fais do do. The fais do do was at night and in Mamou.

En route I joined the station-wagon group in order to do a bit of briefing. I told them about The Lake Charles Little Theatre that is really Rosa's theater, and is known all over the country, not because it was written about in *Life* Magazine as "One of America's livelier experiments in cultural democracy," but because Rosa has made it a place to which theater lovers come from astonishing distances. She produces, casts, directs the plays presented there, paints scenery, gathers properties and puts out publicity. When she is casting, and I have heard this from many and reliable sources, there is no citizen of Lake Charles who, leaving his bed in the morning, can feel any assurance he will return to it that night at his customary hour. He may very well be, instead, on the stage of Rosa's theater, a script of the

coming play in his hand, shouts and bellows from Rosa in his ears, and his name recorded in the cast of characters. This has happened many times. A delivery boy bringing a package to the theater was signed up before he returned to his shop. A bank official consulted in his office at noon one day for advice about financial matters pertaining to the little theater was at 9 p.m. on the acting side of the footlights, script in hand.

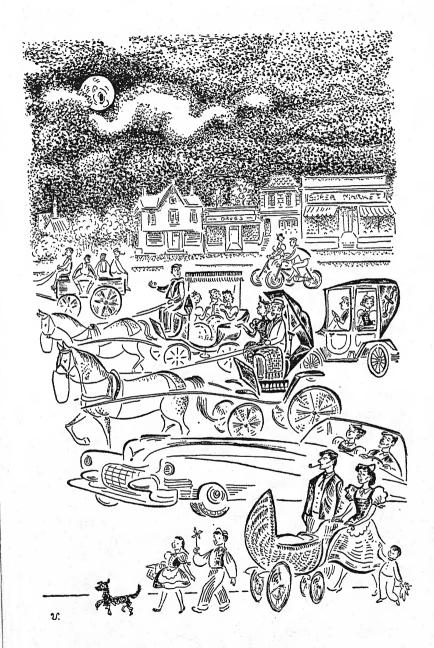
The main street of Mamou at night looked like a scene from an old silent movie of a Western town. It was wide. I daresay it is wide in the daytime, too, but that night along its curbs was an assortment of vehicles I would have thought only Hollywood could have assembled as props. There were several kinds of horse-drawn carriages, each horse nodding into a feed bag. One drew a covered buggy, another an open cart, a third a two-seated carriage, and there were duplicates of these models. I saw a Model T Ford and the newest Cadillac. What I did not see was an open parking space. The Cajuns had come to town for their fais do do.

Three people stood on the sidewalk, evidently waiting for us. They waved at our approach and pointed to two parking places. When we joined them we were introduced by Fred to one of the group called O. C. I learned later his name is José, but that to the Cajuns he was O. C. O. C., a native Mamoun, was our guide for the evening. In his Cajun English—and I cannot reproduce it—he explained that at Mamou there are two halls for a fais do do: one for the old folks, the other a few doors down the street for the young people. We would visit each. The Cajuns were happy to have guests but did not like them to stare like sight-seers that came in just to look. "Like at freaks. You see?" O. C. asked apologetically.

We assured him we did indeed, and wanted to do only what would be the least conspicuous.

O. C. grinned with relief. "Then we all go now," he suggested happily.

We crossed the street. There was no traffic moving on it.



Obviously everybody was already there. We entered a building a few doors to our left. It was a one-story structure, the inside of rough wood. It, too, looked like a bar and dance hall from an early Western movie. The bar was the first room we entered off the street and it was crowded with standees several rows deep. We edged our way round them, and through a doorway into the room beyond that was the dance hall. There were tables and chairs around the edge of this and it was crowded, too, but O. C. led us all the way to the far end and found an empty table there just under the musicians' stand.

We were no sooner seated than the music began again. Old-fashioned fiddle music, it was, the bows scraping the strings, harshly but vigorously, the melody unfamiliar. O. C. was standing behind me. He had chosen not to sit down; he wanted to keep an eye on everything going on, he explained.

He leaned down and spoke close to my ear. Above the music it was hard to hear him. "They play old French tunes," he said, "all Cajun music, especially 'Big Mamou.'"

After a few bars of the music the room began to fill. I saw O. C. had not exaggerated when he said the fais do dos in this hall were for the older folk. Though there were young couples, there were elderly people, too. Hands are not twisted and joints swollen from working only a few years. These faces were lined, the skin thickened by many seasons of labor in the sun. But the dancers carried themselves well and their feet were light on the floor. They did not combine in square dancing; they danced in couples. Here and there one showed off a few fancy steps, but for the most part they went round and round in a sort of two-step in quick time with much arm pumping. There was no cutting in, but the music stopped frequently for a general change of partners.

I beckoned O. C. and he leaned down again. "Am I right," I asked him, "that these people have worked all day and they'll dance here all night, and go back to work again? And they do this twice a week?"

O. C. shrugged his shoulders. "But of course, madame," he

said, "they do not stop the work, but they must have fun to live, isn't it?"

"Yes," I said, "it is. It's wonderful."

At the next intermission, O. C. suggested we might like to visit the other dance hall. The young people's fais do do was only a few doors away from the one we had just left. O. C. said this was to allow parents to keep an eye on their young and yet slip to the other hall for a few rounds themselves. A row of sheets made a curtain on the right of the entry. A couple parted these, and came out. Behind them and the curtains I saw a bar. Fred explained the State was going through a "clean-up" movement that had threatened to be troublesome for the fais do dos, because by law no children may enter a bar. But the Cajuns had resolved the difficulty by cutting off the bar by means of the line of sheets we saw. Presumably, this created for minors an impenetrable barrier. Fred also said the Cajuns had been surprised to learn of the repeal of Prohibition. They hadn't heard about Prohibition.

The music began, the youngsters left their tables and in a minute the dance floor was crowded. Though I saw many on the floor who looked eighteen and a little over, I saw a good number I would have guessed to be not more than nine or ten.

O. C. confirmed my estimate. "They start at the very young," he told me, "and is very good reason for this. Mamas and papas bringing their boys and girls and looking at boys and girls from the other mamas and papas for making marriages. That is why you see mamas and papas all here, so nothing can go bad. But also so something can come good for future."

I asked what the mamas and papas did with their littler ones. "Wait till music stop," O. C. said, "then take quick look down under benches."

I repeated this suggestion to my friends. When the music stopped we ducked our heads quickly, taking a surreptitious look. We saw the littlest ones, each rolled in a blanket. Babies were sleeping on the floor beneath the benches. The next older ones, O. C. said, were in rows on the floor in a room upstairs.

SCRICILLY

We returned to the more conservative gathering, what Sophy termed, "The Philadelphia Assembly" of the fais do do. We entered during an intermission and found a newcomer at our table. Emma introduced us all as friends without bothering about names. The new arrival was Cajun, speaking only French. She was handsome, only moderately tall but with a straight slim figure, clear smooth skin, bright blue eyes and a pompadour of white hair. She wore a straight black dress and over it a bright red sweater.

Within a few minutes she had told us a good deal about herself, that she was in her seventies, she did not care to say just where in them, that she had been a widow for a considerable length of time but had begun to be tired of that single state, and had decided to come into town to look about for a husband. There were not many to be had, but there was some selection.

I asked if she would like to tell us how she would set about making her choice.



She bowed to me graciously and answered in French, "You would perhaps like to see?"

We assured her we would like it very much.

"Then watch," she told us, and rose from the table. She walked to an adjoining one and with a regal nod of the head and charming smile said to the group seated there, "You will permit? I shall return it untouched." As she said this she picked up a wine glass filled nearly to the brim with red wine, and with another nod turned and walked out on the dance floor.

"Play, if you please," she ordered in a firm commanding voice to the musicians on the platform. "A waltz."

Obediently, the musicians picked up their instruments, the leader stamped on the floor a few beats to mark the tempo, and the orchestra swung into a waltz.

Our friend bowed to each corner of the room much like Queen Elizabeth in the ceremony of her coronation, and then slowly raising the glass of wine, set it carefully on the top of her head. When it was placed there to her satisfaction, she withdrew her hand and began to waltz, slowly, and in perfect rhythm, turning this way and that, sometimes completely around. She circled the room. When she had returned to her starting point, she stopped, lifted her hand, removed the glass of wine, bowed again to the musicians. The music stopped. She walked to the table from which she had taken it, set the glass down in its original place, faced the room again and with a ravishing smile called out "Voilà."

Pandemonium was the accolade she received—cheers, shouts, handclappings, stamping on the floor. We were able to reach her before the rest of the room closed in. "Magnifique," we told her, and thanked her "mille fois" for a superb performance.

She acknowledged our tributes graciously and then added with a gamin's wink, "And now you see how it will be."

At the door we turned back and saw how it was: a queen making her selection from among her subjects begging from her any small favor she might bestow.

## Chapter Eleven

LAKE CHARLES WAS FOR US A CARROUSEL THAT WE rode giddily, and there was not just one brass ring to snatch; favors were dropped into our laps on every whirlaround. Never were such hospitable, warm-hearted, gay hosts.

The day was bright and warm when we reached Lake Charles and at the Charleston Hotel we were not only expected, we were welcomed. Our rooms were waiting. They were comfortable and from them we looked down on the lake, aquamarine in the sunlight.

The Lake Charles Little Theatre, where for twenty-eight years Rosa has shouted productions into shape, has been made from an old Wells Fargo stable and it is a rewarding place to see. Delightful reminders of the stable have been emphasized in its decoration, the colors are gay, the seats are comfortable. There is a patio that runs along one side of the building, where coffee is served during intermission and parties held after first nights. We were given a special performance of Edna St. Vincent Millay's Aria da Capo, presented by a cast of children; not a difficult cast to remember since it comprised, apart from one Jelks Jones, daughter of former Governor Jones, members of one family, the Macdonalds, the youngest eight, the oldest about sixteen. They gave a good performance.

My friends gave them and me assurance of this. I would have thought it good had they given an indifferent one. I was in a happy glow over the performance that had preceded theirs. The Mayor and I had been the entire cast. His Honor, Mayor Sidney Gray, had called me to the stage and presented, with a charming speech, a key to the city. Such a thing had never happened to me before, and my friends were gratifyingly sympathetic to my happy surprise. All of them except Sophy. She arrived just in time for the other performance, Aria da Capo.

In the darkness before the curtain rose, she slipped into a seat

beside me, and whispered, "I heard the Mayor was going to give you a key to the city, and you'd be asked to speak in reply. So I stayed on at the restaurant and talked to Fred."

Emma had a party for us next day at lunch in her house a few miles out of town. We numbered fifteen guests, and Emma made us feel we were a cozy group of four or five. She drew us all together into animated general conversation, astonishing me once more with her extraordinary gift for making friends of strangers, almost at the moment of introduction.

Ex-Governor and Mrs. Sam Jones were among the old friends Emma had invited. He was modest about his part in it, but not reluctant to talk about the breakdown of Huey Long's power. "The Cajuns had a lot to do with it," he said among other things. "A Cajun doesn't get mad easily, but when he does, he gets terrible mad and he fights. Eventually they all got terrible mad at the machine, and they fought. Organizing is no trouble for them. They're always organized in the sense that the individual is part of the group: his friends of the bourré game, his fellow workers on the shrimp boat, in the cane field, the grinding mills, the rice plantation, fur trapping, whatever."

We went to Little Pecan Island on Saturday, by car close to two hours, and by boat on the bayou and the superb Intercoastal Canal nearly two hours more. We were guests of Mr. Mordelo Vincent, the owner of the island, who goes by plane on weekends to his cottage. He is there in twenty minutes from Lake Charles. I said I preferred four hours on the ground. It was a pleasant day in a strange, far-off place. The Cajun boy in the film Louisiana Story lived on Little Pecan, we learned. His family worked for the Vincents. Mr. Vincent told us a photographer from Life Magazine came to Little Pecan to photograph the boy and his surroundings, and declared, "Little Pecan is the farthest end of the world," adding that he himself came from New Zealand.

Back at our hotel that night, we said good-by to Emma and Clara on the telephone. I told them our Louisiana party was

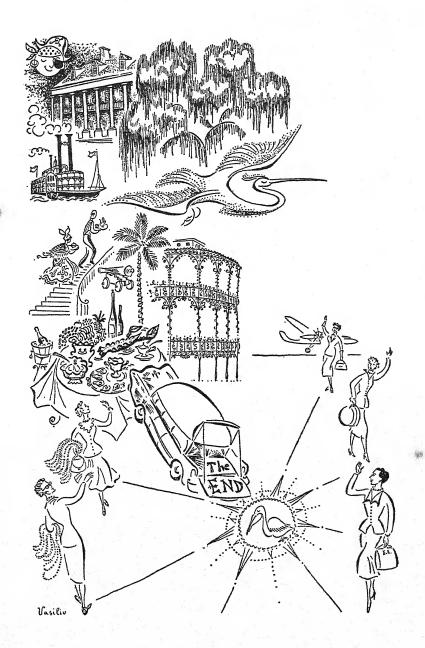
coming to an end and we were so sad at leaving them we really didn't want to see them; we might weep. They agreed and were tempted they said to come on back to New Orleans with us in order to see us all the way to the end and make sure we saw all the places we ought. Kat, overhearing, said loudly she considered this excessive.

We were in New Orleans the next day back at our old rooms there, in time for dinner. Dining at Galatoire's, we came at the conclusion of the meal to a momentous decision: it is both foolish and impossible to say which is the best of the three famous restaurants in New Orleans, Antoine's, Arnaud's or Galatoire's, and it is equally foolish to believe there are any better restaurants, anywhere, than these.

We lunched next day at Antoine's with our dear Howells. It was a reunion of old friends. And what a lunch—buster crabs for my companions, oysters Rockefeller for Mrs. Howell, and with it a card reading this was Oysters Rockefeller No. 1418486. It was like the ducks at the Tour d'Argent in Paris. For Mr. Howell and me pompano, as Antoine's cooks it, in a paper bag.

From Antoine's we went with the Howells to their apartment on Royal Street, and at last Mr. Howell fulfilled the promise he had given to us. We saw the famous and magnificent silver made from the Mexican silver dollars. By Southern custom we could not, of course, be in their house without taking refreshment, no matter how recently and how well we had eaten. We had a liqueur, and this was a specialty of the Howells, one I had not tasted before. We all pronounced it delicious. It is called a Grasshopper, and it is made of one third crème de cacao, one third cream, and one third crème de menthe, beaten lightly and chilled.

Our group began to dissolve the following morning. Darn flew to Pasadena, Kat to New York. Ellen, Sophy and I were left to go by train that night. Sophy and I got up early to see first Kat, then Darn on their way. Ellen was a little vexed with us for not calling her because, she explained severely, she was awak-



ened anyway by Kat's getting ready and would have preferred being awake with us to being awake by herself.

We were packed and immediately we had finished eating at the hotel we separated again temporarily. Ellen and Sophy drove off to Tulane University, where I would join them to hear a concert of the New Orleans Symphony. But first, in a taxi loaded to the roof with our baggage, I went to the station and checked it there. Kat's departure, I realized as I rode, had made no discernible lowering of the original luggage mound.

Sophy and I had been determined from the moment of planning the Louisiana trip to hear our old friend Alex Hilsberg conduct the New Orleans Symphony. This was our first opportunity and not easy of accomplishment, because the time of our train departure would come before the end of the program. I raced back in the taxi from the station to the university, joined Sophy, Ellen and Mrs. Hilsberg at the auditorium just before the first number began. We heard beautiful music, sensitively played, and had time to tell this to Alex briefly, in the intermission.

Shortly after the intermission we had to leave. Whispering a good-by to Neya Hilsberg, we scuttled down the aisle and out the building to the curb where the taxi we had ordered was waiting. A gentleman appeared on the sidewalk abreast of us as we were pulling out. I think we had been introduced to him in Alex's dressing room, but in the darkness I could not see his face.

It was his message that startled me. "I wanted to tell you," he said, "if you're not held up by traffic, you ought to get in with a little time to spare. I urge you as the last thing you do, go to —for a cup of coffee." He named the place to which we had been directed by the bouncer who had ejected us from his restaurant on the night of our arrival in New Orleans.

I daresay I left the gentleman on the curb a little surprised, because there was no time to explain. I put my head out the window as we drove away and called back to him. "This is where we came in."

# The Smiling Rebel



A NOVEL BASED ON THE LIFE OF BELLE BOYD

by Harnett T. Kane



AN ABRIDGEMENT

# The Author

HARNETT T. KANE, a native of New Orleans, is one of the best-known modern interpreters of the South. In 15 years, Mr. Kane has written 15 books, all of them national best sellers. His first, Louisiana Hayride, was published in 1941, and since then Mr. Kane has written Bride of Fortune, New Orleans Woman, The Lady of Arlington and Spies for the Blue and Gray, to name but a few.

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# Part One

# THE GROUNDWORK

"What I had done
was not done in the consciousness that I was a spy.
I only wanted to help my people."

-BELLE BOYD

1

THE COFFEE CUP clattered against its saucer because Frances' hand was trembling a little, and a persuasive aroma curled upward from the bedside table. The same dark hand shook the girl's bare shoulder, but she merely buried her nose lower in the pillow, light hair fanned out in a bright circle around her.

"Miss Belle, you never get back home tonight." Frances' voice had a high, fretful note. "Your ma's all fixed, and gone down the street on some errands."

Belle opened one eye, closed it, and dozed again. For a few minutes she would return to last night's ballroom and the long waxed floor over which she had glided so happily. A strain of melody drifted through her half-dreams: "We'll dance till they stop us, till they tell us it's time." She remembered the pressure of the hand at her waist, the caressing look in the young man's eyes. On that April evening of 1861 she had enjoyed, with a special sad-sweet sense of farewell, the flurry of the Washington City ball.

During the past few years at private school in Baltimore, Belle had listened wistfully as more privileged girls chattered about great parties. When the Boyds had an especially bad year at little

Martinsburg in the Shenandoah Valley, she had given up her hopes of a winter in Washington. Then the tobacco crop improved, and these recent months had been full of parties and receptions and rides along the wide, shady avenues. But for her there had been something more important than the mere entertainment—the feeling that she was in the center of things.

"Please, Miss Belle! Your pa go'n' to worry himse'f crazy if you miss the train." Frances spoke, as the voice of conscience. As Belle rose and sipped the now-lukewarm coffee, Frances' protruding eyes stared at her in gloomy insistence, and full realization of the need for hurry came back to the girl.

For several months she had watched Washington stir with successive crises—the fears and hopes that Abe Lincoln would never take office, the secession of Southern state after Southern state, and the cold March day when Lincoln became President while soldiers stood guard everywhere with guns.

Belle remembered the day Jefferson Davis got up in the Senate for his solemn, impassioned farewell. Now seven states had quit the Union, and Confederate forces drilled in Southern fields as Mr. Davis headed the new nation down in Alabama. Going to the washbowl, she recalled the week's rumors, retold by her friend Betty Duvall: in Charleston the Confederate Beauregard trained his guns ever more steadily on Fort Sumter, still in Union hands. Yet Virginia itself had not joined the Southern government, and everything remained undecided.

As Belle washed and then dried her face with the towel handed to her by Frances, she felt a sudden return of her natural optimism. Perhaps even now the South would receive its rights, the way some people predicted. Or it might simply carry on its new regime without war. . . . "This dress all right?" Frances held out Belle's long muslin, a pale, flowered yellow. Belle nodded and stepped to the mirror to draw up her glinting gold hair with the curl at its ends. Studying her long light eyes, she smiled. As a child, she had fumed when classmates joked about their slight slant. Today she needed nobody to tell her they were her best feature. Her nose had strength,

though she regretted the bridge of freckles that crossed it and her cheeks. She touched her lips. If only they were less pronounced. . . .

Quick steps tapped up the stairs, and her mother pushed open the door with a throaty cry. "It's all over the city, Belle! Fort Sumter's given way, surrendered to the South."

Belle ran to the window. Drawing back the curtain, she saw in the street below a hubbub such as she had never imagined. Crowds of men stood together at the corners, arguing over newspapers. A moment later the doorbell sounded and she recognized the step of her friend, Betty Duvall. Standing in the doorway, her wide, olive face flushed with excitement, Betty cried out:

"Everything's happening at once, Belle! They say Lincoln's going to send out a proclamation asking for thousands on thousands of men to put down the Confederates. All the Northern states and the Western ones, too, are going to jump to arms. They claim that this will make everybody take one side or the other."

Her voice low, Belle asked, "And Virginia?"

"In twenty-four hours she'll be with the Confederacy."

They spoke casually, but Belle became aware of an undertone of concern, almost of uneasiness. Betty shrugged, and added with lively curiosity, "Will you be seeing Cliff McVay again?"

At the mention of her main partner at the ball Belle turned away. "I suppose not." She made an effort to keep her tone light. "He'll certainly be volunteering now."

Betty's eyes searched her face. "Last night Cliff was interested in a lot more than the military."

"Oh, he's seven or eight years older than I am." Belle parried the remark, but then she began to wonder just how she did feel toward Cliff McVay. The McVays lived in a village not far from Martinsburg and she had known him since childhood.

She owed Cliff a definite debt of gratitude, Belle reminded herself. In Washington, Cliff had taken her and her mother to several balls and Belle had sensed admiring glances as they swung through the movements of the dance. The trouble, she 隐

fretted, was that he realized it. She wished he were less certain about everything, including himself! Though she could not forget the way his eyes softened and his arm tightened around her in the waltz, she could still hear his bantering words when they parted: "I'd like to meet you again, Bell—especially a couple of years from now." With that he had assumed an older-brother air that made her furious.

Belle was brought back to the present by her maid's worried voice: "The driver's here, and he won' wait all day." Behind Frances stood a Negro helper, sweating with the day's heavy exertions. Giving the man directions for handling their baggage, Belle put on her hat and escorted her mother to the landing.

On the stairs, with Betty Duvall directly behind her, she discovered that her friend was whispering in her ear: "Belle, do you remember last night, what Madame said to you? Let me know if you can get back here, and if you really want to help." What was Betty talking about? Mary Boyd turned around with a look of pointed inquiry, and Betty lapsed into silence.

Belle glanced at Betty again and after a moment she began to guess at the explanation. It must have something to do with Mrs. Rose Greenhow, the lively widow and leading hostess of Washington. But what did Betty mean by talking of Belle's returning to "help"? Help in what?

Halting at the carriage door, Belle listened with a thumping heart to a group of men who shouted at one another. "This whole damned town's going to be shut off." The youth who cried the words in a strongly Southern voice, caught the lapel of another. "They'll be raiding Washington out of Virginia any day now. Half the militia here is secretly Southern, and half the people, too." He chuckled sardonically. "We'll make Washington City the new capital of the Confederacy."

So the whole issue might be settled right here, and practically overnight. Belle wondered if, despite everything, they should stay on in Washington. As if she read her daughter's mind, Mary Boyd jogged her arm. "Girl, that's all the more reason to get out of this place." Belle let her mother draw her inside the

carriage, waved a last time to the tense-faced Betty, and they rode slowly off.

There stood the unfinished dome of the Capitol, gaunt and cheerless, heavy derricks against the clouded sky. Her mood saddened. So many times had she passed this place and the White House as well. Now they would be the center of the Northern Union, a rival nation. If she re-entered, it would be as an enemy.

Belle's lips tightened. Nevertheless she would come back again; of that she felt certain. But a little later, when they approached the soot-stained railroad station, she realized that she and her mother might have trouble even in getting out of Washington City. As passengers entered the building, blue-clad men stopped them for questioning, and she heard the echoes of furious arguments.

Frances gave a groan. "We go'n' spend the war here, with Mr. Lincoln!" Belle snapped, "Stop it right now." More of that talk, and Mary Boyd would be in tears; already her mother had begun to tremble. Belle signaled to an attendant to take their trunks, and sailed confidently toward the nearest Union soldier: "We belong in Virginia and we're going home, sir—and there's nothing you can do to stop us!"

Several passers-by looked around in interest, and one or two snickered. Her heart beat heavily; had she been too loud, too belligerent? As the private's eyes narrowed, she quailed. He folded his arms, however, and all at once a grin spread over his whiskered face.

"Now, little lady, ain't you a sass-pot? Well, on with you." His thumb jerked, and Belle helped her mother and Frances into the train. She noticed that the Union man missed no detail of her figure; her throat above the low lace collar, the lift of her ankle against the froth of her petticoats.

As she threw him an icy glance, he laughed. "Well, missy, see you in Richmond. When we burn it down."

She stuck her head through the train door. "If I see you there, you'll be hanging on the gallows."

Mary Boyd's face became a cloud of disapproval. "Belle! Calling out that way, like—almost like a fishwife!" And Frances concurred sternly. "It's jus' too much of this free-style Washington; we go'n' to have to get it out of your system." Belle's look brightened in amusement, and her mother shook her head again. "Child, I believe you'd smile on your way to the gallows."

Soon afterward Belle's mood changed again as the train started. They went slowly through Leesburg, Harper's Ferry, and on toward Martinsburg. With every mile Belle saw signs of spring in the valley; the soft bloom of fruit trees, the carpeting of green over meadows. The blue-gray haze that lay ahead—for her that meant, above all, the Shenandoah.

She began to think of her younger sister, Mary, and her brothers, Glenn and Will. More and more, however, Belle remembered her father, with the irregular part in his graying hair, and the slow grin that lifted one corner of his face higher than the other.

She fell asleep against the dusty seat, dreaming of last night's dance and of Cliff McVay's gibe at her youth. After that Abe Lincoln himself seemed to stand before her, a long bony finger moving toward her face, and in the distance she made out the enigmatic Mrs. Greenhow, watching, watching, and speaking words Belle could not understand.

"Belle, we're getting in." Lifting her head, she glimpsed the town rising gray-white in the dark. Her heart jumped at the sight of their home roof, barely in view as they rolled past the old schoolhouse. Then they were rolling into the wooden station, and she saw a crowd of neighbors.

Where was Pa? As she stepped down, ahead of her mother and Frances, a soldier, a rather squat man, moved toward them in the shadow. The hat hid his face, and Belle wondered if the stranger had a message for them. "Hey, there, hey, there!" he called. He took off his hat and Belle gaped at her father, who gazed back as if begging for recognition.

Dropping her small bag, she darted toward him and almost fell into Ben's arms. Poor Pa, so unsoldierlike, so impractical in most things . . . And now he would be leaving them.

Mary Boyd had emerged from the darkness. As her mother and father embraced, Belle tried to think of ways to broach the matter of Ben's military service. At last she asked, "How—how did it happen?"

If he noticed the bluntness of the question, he did not heed it. "Just yesterday, Belle," Ben answered quietly. "I didn't think I should wait any longer, so I volunteered. As a private." He uttered the last words proudly, almost defiantly. "Things are happening everywhere, Belle. Lincoln's calling for seventy-five thousand troops, the biggest army the country's ever seen."

In the silence that followed the music of that last ball in Washington City rang sadly in Belle's ears: "We'll dance on till they stop us, till they tell us it's time." The ball was over now.

2

FOR A FEW excited days Ben Boyd stayed with his family; friends called to say good-bys and the Boyds attended small parties for the men who would be leaving. It was a time of tension, of sudden change, overnight enlistments, and startling though generally false rumors.

Soon Belle stood at the station with the rest of the family for the long farewells, as Ben left with four or five younger men to join the Second Virginia Infantry, at Harper's Ferry.

"Good-by, good-by . . ." Ben's lips parted in that kindly, crooked smile, and he waved as the cars rounded the curve. For a few minutes Belle comforted her mother, and then took the arm of her friend, Sophie Blount. They had work ahead of them; she and Sophie had quickly agreed to make village calls to raise funds for her father's regiment.

Belle's mood improved as she reflected that they would be working for the South, helping clothe and supply Ben's organization. On their first call the merchant bowed them in. "Of course I'll give that much and a little more besides," he said, and handed them several bills. The girls left glowing with pride.

The next man, however, greeted them with marked restraint. When they entered the parlor of Mr. Ludlow, newly arrived in Martinsburg, Belle began as blithely as she could. "You'll want to help us, won't you?" Mr. Ludlow's face darkened, and he snapped, "The only help I'll give will be to my own country, the United States."

Belle and Sophie left in an angry silence. Their next call brought a favorable and calming response. Then they made their last stop, and had the greatest surprise of the day. The elderly Mr. Gaillard, Ben's fellow vestryman at the Episcopal church, received them with a calm welcome.

"Sit down, young ladies. I'll answer as best I can. My people fought in the Revolution, and today I'm taking the stand I believe they'd be taking. I can see only ruin for everybody in this war. The hotspurs on both sides"—his pale hands tensed with emotion—"they've caused this tragedy. But now I'm ready to do whatever I can for the Union."

Their old friend seemed close to tears. Belle thought of one argument after another, yet it hardly appeared proper to debate the subject with this soft-voiced, troubled man.

On the way home Sophie spoke thoughtfully. "Belle, there's a lot more Union sentiment in town than some people will admit. Think how many small farmers we have in this section; they hate slavery more than any other thing. If we get fighting in the valley, the whole place may be split." Unhappy and uncertain, Belle nodded.

She was not prepared for the newspaper account that Mary Boyd held out to her: a large band of Western Virginia Unionists had gathered in convention to form a new state separate from Virginia. An election would be held next month in the western counties. Belle shook her head in anger: "That's terrible; a Virginian's a Virginian."

Later that day Belle had a note from Cliff McVay. He had enlisted, won a rating as a sergeant, and found army life a high adventure. For a few minutes she enjoyed Cliff's casual flow of comment and news of fellow Virginians.

"I'm ready for my first battle," he wrote, "and I'll send you the first dozen Yankee guns that I take." The letter's postscript, "Am thinking of you, Belle, just as any 'older brother' would," irritated her. She didn't want to be a younger sister to anybody.

June passed slowly, with only vague, intermittent reports of troop movements. There was talk of a Federal movement against the Southern forces, somewhere in the valley, but it did not materialize. Late one afternoon Belle reached town just as a column of soldiers approached the railroad station. At once she saw that they were Confederates. But the warm greeting that came to her lips died when their leader called out an order: "Half of you men over there, get to the machinery shops. You take the rest, and pour the oil heavy!"

With a dozen other onlookers she stared in sick surprise at the scurrying soldiers. Only a few years earlier the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad had put up, at high cost, big new machinery shops at this junction point. Now, as she watched with clouded eyes, the soldiers went to work efficiently, skillfully, to destroy everything. To the several weak protests of civilians the officer in charge made a brief answer: "We just got to do it! We can't let the Yanks take it."

The next day, as Belle and Sophie looked over the charred wrecks, Mary Boyd drove up and called urgently, "You're coming home, right now. The Confererates are setting up camp at Falling Waters. The Yankees are going to try to force a passage near here, and nobody knows what may happen."

The day passed slowly, agonizingly. Late in the evening Belle agreed to go to bed. Suddenly she was awake, a dull roar in her ears. It must be thunder, she told herself; but even as she voiced the thought she knew it was the pound of artillery.

Soon after early light the firing ended. Was this a good sign, or a bad one? Belle started to dress with trembling hands. She had not finished coiling her hair when Frances ran in.

"Soldiers comin' down the road. No, nobody know what side!"

Belle thrust her hair under a bonnet and slipped out. Beneath a sheltering tree she stood beside two older men, neighbors who had appeared for the same purpose, until they spotted the first soldiers of the approaching line.

"They're ours! Look there."

Her heart leaping, Belle darted out to the road. On came the Confederates in loose files, soldier after tired, sagging soldier. She heard one of them answer a neighbor's question: "No, neither side won, I guess. But we only lost a few."

Only a few . . . Belle's hand went to her throat. Was Ben among them?

Then she recognized the grime-blackened countenance of her father. Her vision began to blur; thank God he had survived.

Ben Boyd walked with a limp, and there were circles under his eyes she had never seen before. Still the well-remembered grin lifted one corner of his mouth.

Continuing to walk beside the men until they neared the Boyd house, Belle motioned excitedly. Mary Boyd, hands tense at her sides, was standing at the gate.

The officer in charge ordered a halt. "Break ranks!" Mary met her husband in the middle of the road and flung her arms around him.

All of the Boyds talked at once, of the recent battle, the new Western Virginia government, Ben's experiences. Belle's father said little of himself; he spoke mainly of General Tom Jackson, "Old Jack," his commander. When her father took his place in the line, Belle stood waving good-bye with her mother until the column was lost in the dust.

Sophie had joined her and as they moved toward the house, an officer approached them with a grave air. "We have to leave some of our wounded in town, at the school building. Can you young ladies help take care of them? The enemy's right nearby," he admitted. Belle and Sophie were eager to help and he left with hasty thanks and a salute.

For the first time Belle realized how close the Federal forces had come. Solemnly she started with Sophie toward the converted schoolhouse. In a bare room they discovered two gaunt-cheeked youths on beds in a corner. It was a narrow, stifling chamber and it held a sweet-sour stench that brought Belle's hand involuntarily to her nose.

Behind her she heard the maid Frances' familiar, high-pitched voice: "Your ma say I should watch after you two, down here with naked men in bed." Belle grimaced. A chaperon under these conditions! . . . While Sophie went out for extra supplies, she and Frances labored with two newly arrived women helpers.

After a time the patients, well cleansed and refreshed, lay back in silent gratitude. So intently had the women worked that they were startled by the high notes of a fife and the roll of drums. Union forces were pounding in; at her post beside one of the beds Belle half rose when the vanguard marched into view.

Her mouth went dry. There were so many of them, file on file of bayonets catching the sun, gun carriages thundering by. She saw a number of the Boyds' close Confederate friends, standing grimly beside the road. She picked out dozens of others, however, who were laughing and cheering the new arrivals. Only a day or two ago some of them had been crying their faith in the Confederacy; others, she remembered bitterly, had been non-committal until they learned which side would take over.

Around the corner there appeared a great banner, the American Stars and Stripes, and Belle was transfixed by an emotion she could not define. Most of her life, she had been stirred as that standard passed. Now it had become the symbol of the enemy.

A moment later she was jarred as three figures in blue uniform walked in. The oldest, an infantry captain, ran forward, carrying the Union banner. Belle could only stare as he approached the patients with a look of hatred. "You dirty rebs, this is the flag you've dishonored. You recognize it?" The captain waved it over the prone figures.

Belle grew furious. "Whoever you are, stop that! These men are as helpless as babies, and you know it."

"And who may you be, miss?"

Belle remembered Mary Boyd's caution; for once she would be quiet. It was Frances who replied, "A rebel lady."

The maid's words were a quiet rebuke. With a swift glance around the room the captain strode off again, muttering, "In any case, she's a damned independent one!" Belle watched him leave, her eyes following him into the crowd of soldiers who milled outside. Several of them, looking through the window, were talking angrily about the wounded Confederates.

Later, as she walked back home, she heard the drunken soldiers yelling, "Wait for tomorrow, all you rebs." "You'll see a real Fourth of July!"

She had forgotten that the next day would be the national holiday, and the Unionists would have something special to celebrate in Martinsburg. She went upstairs and took the family pistol from her father's desk. From now on she would carry it with her.

Observance of the Fourth began early. As Belle left the breakfast table she heard the heavy tramp of men in the street. Peering behind the curtain, she spotted a scuffling group next door. There was a crash, a smashing of glass, and Mrs. Boyd called in a hollow voice, "They're breaking into the Amsleys'." The Amsleys had three sons in the Confederate Army. "They're hunting Confederate flags."

Instantly Belle started upstairs. She had a large Southern banner on her wall, and more than one Martinsburg resident had seen it. Before she could reach the upper floor, however, the front door swung open and ten or twelve men broke in.

"What do you want? You've got no right here!" The girl darted toward them, but they ignored her. The leader reached for a china cup on the nearest table, balanced it delicately, and sent it crashing to the floor. Another snatched up an andiron and used it to sweep a row of figures off the mantel.

"Belle, don't let them do it!" screamed her little sister, who had regarded the pieces as her special treasures. Belle reached out for the child, and as she held her, felt the outlines of the pis-

tol in her own pocket. One of the raiders lifted his sword and cut a long gash in the top of the inlaid table.

As Belle glared at him, the man remembered something: "That reb flag!" He clambered up the stairs, and desperately the girl followed him. A moment later a dark figure scurried along the upper hall. Where had Frances been? The soldiers soon located Belle's room; she entered with them and stared at a blank wall. In a burst of relief she told herself that Frances had acted more intelligently than any of the rest of the family.

"Miss Boyd, you think you're damned smart, don't you?" The leader was more furious than ever. "Well, we've heard all about your lousy reb flag." A new arrival appeared, holding up a Union standard. "This house is going to have the right flag over it, from now on!"

All at once Mary Boyd moved toward them, and the woman who had always shrunk from violence spoke in a deliberate, commanding voice. "You're not going to raise that flag!"

"Yeah?" The leader seized her arm. "God damn you and your whole bunch of traitors." As his hand tightened on Mary's wrist, she cried out. Belle reached toward them, and was thrown against the wall.

The impact stunned her for a moment, but when Mary Boyd whimpered Belle's hand went to her pocket. Without further conscious thought she pulled out the pistol. She had to stop that man, make him let her mother alone. She saw a glint of light, heard a flat report, and felt the gun kick.

As if she were watching an incident involving strangers, Belle stared. The soldier fell and a bright red circle seeped through his shirt at a point below the shoulder. She still held the gun. Through the smoke she looked on while the other Unionists carried him down the stairs. When the door slammed, the girl reached out to catch her mother; Mary had finally collapsed.

Supporting her mother, Belle put her hand to her own eyes. Later she would have to deal with the memory of this episode, of that spot of blood. Now she must get ready to face whatever resulted. She came to attention as Frances shook her.

"Miss Belle, them soldiers pilin' wood and paper 'round the house. Go'n' set it afire!"

Frances took the bewildered Mrs. Boyd to her room and Belle went to an upper window. The air was filled with shouted threats and she saw a thin trickle of smoke. She walked unsteadily to her desk. "Officer in charge—Urgent," she wrote on an envelope, enclosed a message, and pressed it into Frances' hands.

"You're the only one that might be able to do this," she told the girl. "Talk your way through, no matter what you have to tell them. . . ."

The next few minutes were, in a way, the worst part of the day.

Heavy footsteps sounded below, and a dignified colonel stood in the doorway. He spoke with restraint:

"Miss Boyd, your note arrived, and things are being cleared up outside." He stopped at the sight of overwhelming relief in their faces. Then his voice became stern. "The man at the hospital is in a serious condition; I'm here to make an investigation." Belle felt a stab of fear, an impulse to run out of the house and hide. Clenching her shaking hands, she looked directly at the officer. Slowly, without argument, she described what had happened. The face before her was entirely without expression, and she wondered if the Colonel believed a word she said. Finally she rose and silently pointed to the damaged table, the broken glass on the floor. As the Colonel turned to consult his subordinates, there was a knock.

The guard at the door whispered to the officer, who pondered a moment. When Belle glanced toward the hall, her throat constricted. There was Mr. Gaillard, the Unionist attorney, who had let her understand clearly how much he opposed the Confederacy.

The girl swallowed nervously. Suppose he reported her pro-Southern activities, her bitterness toward the North. . . .

"I simply want to say," he began, addressing the Colonel, "that I've known Miss Boyd and her mother for most of their

lives. They've never been in any sort of trouble. And as I passed through town today, I noticed a dozen cases of wretched behavior on the part of"—he emphasized his words—"our soldiers. As a Unionist, I regret the way they acted, the way they provoked a great many people."

Belle could have wept with gratitude. The officers went into the hall for a long conversation, and the women waited tensely alone.

When the Colonel returned his words were brief and not unkind. "Miss Boyd, it seems clear that there has been a great deal of unwarranted bad behavior here today. I'm inclined to believe there will be no further action in the matter. Still, you'd be well advised to stay close to home for a few days. In times like these . . ." Shrugging, he added, "And there'll be sentries outside, in case more trouble starts."

A bow, and he had gone. Belle sank onto the sofa. She supposed she should be crying now, but she felt only a great weariness, a sudden depletion. After a moment, however, she shook her head, as if to reject such weakness. The tramp of the soldiers on guard duty brought to mind her father and his regiment, only ten miles or so away. She had work to do for them.

3

"THAT SOUNDS INTERESTING, Captain Gwyn—whatever a 'deployment' may mean." Belle shrugged, and her eyes, bland and steady, let the Union officer know that she talked of such subjects only because he brought them up. "Why don't you military men use words that other people can understand?"

The Captain plunged happily into an explanation. In spite of the strain of the week that followed the shooting incident Belle's face had only unclouded candor and a friendly simplicity that he found unusually appealing.

"By the way, no more threats against you?" he asked, and she

shook her head. Immediately after the shooting anonymous notes had arrived at the house, and once or twice, despite the sentries on duty, warnings had been shouted from the dark. The Federal officers called after each episode, and Belle managed to make friendly acquaintances of most of them.

"You still keep the gun near you?" The Captain inquired. On the day of the hearing the Colonel had confiscated the Boyds' family pistol, but after Belle let Gwyn read one of the virulent messages, he had offered to lend her his.

"You're more than generous, sir, and we feel much safer now," she smiled. "Oh!" Rising, Belle indicated the dark, heavyset girl in the doorway. "Frances is getting the punch ready. Let me make sure it's right."

The moment the door closed behind her, she began to whisper intently to Frances. "You went to the colored man at the camp commissary? Tell me what he said, just the way he said it." One certain way to learn an army's plans, she now knew, was to find out about the kitchen arrangements. As Frances answered, Belle scratched a few words on thin paper and added the information just dropped by Captain Gwyn. She had perfected the technique of giving succinctly and clearly every fact she had, together with a notation of its source.

"Now," she directed Frances, "meet the man with the same blue cap at the regular place. Yes, five o'clock, and you'll have to walk fast. Be sure you have enough eggs in the basket, so that it will seem right. If anybody asks, you're ready to sell every one of them. Roll the paper in your stocking. Fine!" The maid's eyes were unhappy, but Belle was certain she would follow orders precisely.

On her way back to the parlor with the punch Belle took a summer rose from the vase, pinning it at her throat. She smiled again at Captain Gwyn. "Extra sugar today. We didn't forget the way you liked it." She paused, pitcher in hand. "What is it? You look as if you have something unpleasant to tell me."

The Captain put down his glass. "As a matter of fact, I've been hunting a way to bring this up. The point is . . . The soldier—the one that hurt your mother—died this morning."

The silence eddied around them, and Belle's eyes clouded. "I'm sorry to hear he died. I'm glad he didn't have a wife or children, anyway."

The Captain gave her a quick glance. "How did you know that?" It was a foolishly casual remark; she did not want him to realize how much she had learned from the sentries. "Oh, they're saying it around town." She poured more punch, and after a few minutes the Captain left. Standing at the door, she suffered a twinge of conscience. Captain Gwyn was a rather guileless man, kindly and well meaning. Yet he remained an enemy, and one she could use.

His step still echoed outside when Mrs. Boyd peered in, so furtively that Belle laughed in spite of her own tension. Ignoring her daughter's amusement, Mary whispered, "Frances is away again, and I asked you not to send her any more." The round face was a network of anxiety. "You've got to keep out of this. We're in these people's power entirely, and you don't realize how dangerous it can be for all of us."

Belle took her mother's hands. "Look, by accident I'm in a good position to learn about the enemy. You've been talking about duty. Well, it's my duty to do this."

The next week all but a few Federal soldiers left Martinsburg, and rumors spread of vast Northern forces poised for a crushing blow at Virginia. "On to Richmond, on to Richmond..." The cry had risen throughout the Union; one great victory and the war would be over! More and more often they heard talk of Manassas, the little Virginia railroad center, thirty miles from Washington. It protected the routes to Richmond, and once the Union smashed through at Manassas the new Confederate capital would be doomed. Both sides were regrouping their men, and nobody had actual information. Then came reports of a great battle beginning at Manassas, the worst of the war.

During that first day Belle heard a man shout in the street, "War's over! The Union sent the rebs reelin'!" But she recognized him as a Unionist farmer. Such a source wouldn't be reliable; yet she found in her heart a conviction of disaster.

The lack of real news was maddening. Their lives were being settled, and they could do nothing at all about it.

Finally there was a rattle at the door. Sophie Blount, her face wet with perspiration, almost collapsed into Belle's arms. Unable to speak, she handed the girl a paper. Taking it, Belle warned herself before she read it that she must be prepared; no matter how bad the news, she must not break down.

"Victory. Astonishing Southern success." Her mouth fell open in amazement. The Union was in headlong withdrawal from Manassas, thousands of men running back to Washington, equipment deserted, injured and prisoners left behind.

"Belle, every hospital around here is filled, and they've sent some of the wounded to Martinsburg." The girl did not need to hear more. She and her neighbors worked for hours with baths, medicines, and salves, attending to patients, preparing additional rooms. At dusk they finally sat down to catch their breaths.

Belle reflected that a few weeks ago she would have shuddered and turned away from the wounds and stumps of legs and arms that she treated today. Now she sighed tiredly and listened to the hum of women's voices in the alcove beyond.

"Yes, Stonewall! We could do with a lot more like him."

"In the middle of Manassas, when the rest were running, they looked up and there stood Jackson, like a stone wall."

Belle's eyes softened. All over the South people were speaking this way of Tom Jackson. He had become a hero overnight.

The next words from the alcove startled her. "And who'd ever have thought Rose Greenhow would throw Lincoln's government into such a fury?" She joined the group and asked for details.

"They've just arrested her, Belle. Why, for spying, of course! It turned out she had a whole ring, men and women, government clerks, army officers.

"Madame Greenhow was the one who sent word to Beauregard, telling exactly where the North would attack. The South shifted Johnston's army to meet the Yankees, and won. This

Betty girl took Madame's message tucked in her hair, and brought it to the Southern camp."

Belle's eyes widened. "You mean Betty Duvall?"

"That's the one. What have you heard about her?"

"Just the name." She made an excuse to leave; she had to gather her thoughts. This must have been what Betty was whispering about when they parted. If she had only understood a bit more . . . With sudden bitterness she told herself: Mrs. Greenhow and her aides had been up there in the very center of things, while she rusted away in the country. A moment later, as she walked home, she remembered that Madame Greenhow was now behind bars. Still, how gladly she would have taken the same chances!

4

MARY BOYD'S happy excitement was immediately apparent to Belle when she came to supper one night two weeks later. "Girl, your father writes that they're to be at Manassas for the winter, and you and I can visit for some weeks if we want."

Would she want it! Already Belle had begun to plan her preparations. They would write Ben and go by train, boarding at a big house in the camp area.

When Ben jumped from the wagon at the Manassas station and drew Mary into his arms, Belle saw how much this reunion meant to both her parents. With a wave she left them together, and walked along the road at the edge of the camp. She was startled when a tall young officer with an air of casual command approached and swept off his hat. "Belle! I recognized you half a mile off."

Cliff McVay was grinning down at her. The uniform fitted him trimly, and he looked handsomer than ever.

Glancing up through her lashes, she asked with a smile, "How is my 'big brother'?"

Cliff's eyes surveyed her in a way that made her wonder if she should be annoyed or flattered. He gave a long, amused sigh. "When I look at you now, Belle, I don't feel a bit like a brother!"

She blushed with pleasure. Just then her mother and father came up, and after a few casual words Mary inquired, "We'll be seeing you again?"

"I'm afraid not, ma'am. I'm leaving in an hour." As Cliff spoke, his glance let Belle know that he intended the information primarily for her. "Yesterday they gave me another assignment, and a promotion to lieutenant."

She congratulated him, but her disappointment at his transfer was greater than she would have liked to admit. "We'll meet again," Cliff whispered when he said good-by. "I promise it."

Belle tried to stop thinking of Cliff as Ben took them about the camp. It was at Manassas that the Confederates had changed the war's course, she reminded herself, and soon she grew fascinated when Ben pointed out the lines of fire and the points at which the issue had been settled.

"That's where Stonewall held his ground. No, he's not here now, Belle . . ." "The Yanks just dropped their guns and left." A cheerful, booming voice lifted behind them. "And over there Ben Boyd gave a fine account of himself!" Belle turned, to be confronted by a beaming blond semi-giant.

"Oh, Captain Gilmor." Embarrassed by the compliment, Ben paused. "My wife and daughter."

Harry Gilmor greeted Mrs. Boyd with an urbane compliment and inclined his head toward Belle. "Of course I know about you, miss. Been pistol practicing on any more Yanks?"

But when he read her hurt and angry look, the big man flushed. "Sorry. I didn't mean any offense." He seemed so much at a loss that she went to work to make up for it, and gave him a quick smile.

"I understand a bit about suspicious Yankees," Captain Gilmor grinned as he walked on beside them. "They sniffed my intentions and arrested me to keep me from enlisting. The min-

ute they let me loose I proved they were right, by slipping over the Potomac. Didn't like to miss anything, so I signed up with Turner Ashby."

Belle required no further explanation; of late she had heard more and more of the feats of Ashby and his Seventh Virginia Cavalry, scouts and raiders. Her father added, "Whenever we want a closer look at the Union than the Union wants us to have, Colonel Ashby slips in and out, and we act on everything he learns."

The girl's keen interest brightened her eyes. "The Colonel's riding up now," Captain Gilmor said, at the approach of a remarkable figure. The famous Ashby had a tight, lean frame and a complexion so brown that it appeared Arabic, like that of a desert fighter. Belle's glance met a pair of dark, luminous eyes above an inky beard. Though he swept off his hat to the women, Ashby did not halt. "The men call him the Black Knight," whispered Gilmor in awe and affection.

That night, Belle planned just what she would say to Gilmor or Ashby when they met again. Opportunity was close, and she intended to make the most of it. Yet to see either man again proved far more difficult than she had anticipated.

The days and evenings at camp proved lively enough, with dances, theatricals, and sleigh rides. Belle danced with the younger officers, but her mind was on more important things.

... Over her fan Belle's eyes surveyed the room. Searching for Gilmor or Ashby, she heard a woman's voice. "Mrs. Greenhow, you mean? She's been in prison nearly four months. Even that doesn't stop her; she's managed to get messages out, using a code of embroidered flowers. The Yankees think they're only pretty designs!"

Belle stopped, frankly listening. One of the group beckoned her and she joined it. Nearly everyone, it developed, had a rumor or theory about the fascinating widow, and one speaker said, shrugging, "Well, a lot of us aren't so sure about that lady. She could even be a secret Yankee agent, playing us for fools."

The woman's bright green eyes circled her listeners, as if challenging them to differ. Belle felt a flash of anger. Why were some people so quick to accept any derogatory story that floated around? The argumentative lady reached for another subject.

"We don't hear any more talk about the 'great Lee,' do we? All he can do is draw away," she snickered. "Now they call him 'Evacuating Lee'!"

This time Belle snapped out an answer: "People who know a lot more than you about such things say nobody could have won under those conditions. General Lee's done as much for the South as anybody in this room!"

Belle's words rang out more loudly than she intended, and she discovered that she was trembling with anger. Treading her way among the dancers, she snatched up her coat and stood on the gallery in the half-light, her breath coming quickly.

Slowly she realized that two men had stepped up behind her. "Miss Belle, you certainly gave the ladies something to think about." It was Harry Gilmor, and when she turned, she saw his crinkling smile of approval. She glanced at the other officer, and her heart beat more quickly as she recognized the dark Turner Ashby.

Acknowledging the introduction, Colonel Ashby said nothing more. Belle's thoughts were racing; it might be a long time before she had such a chance again, and she had to speak quickly. "Please!" Her eyes went from one to the other. "At home I've taken messages or sent them through the lines. I'd like to help you here. You must have papers or—or things that you want to get through? I've had experience; people at home can tell you . . ."

She cursed herself for stumbling this way. Were they amused, or was she imagining it? Gilmor answered, "Miss Belle, we like your spirit, your interest in the war. Still, things are quiet, and very little is happening this winter."

"That's one of our troubles. We're taking it too easy!" As she spoke she told herself that she must sound naïve to these military men, but Colonel Ashby responded sharply. "You're entirely

right, Miss Boyd. We are resting, most of us . . . and there may be times when, for one reason or other, we'd like you to serve on certain errands." He was definitely not amused, and his earnest note made Belle confident again.

Belle rose each morning, certain that this would be the day when either Ashby or Gilmor would send her a message; at night she retired glumly to bed. She might have missed her opportunity had she not caught a glimpse of Captain Gilmor at dusk toward the end of the week. Tall and striking, he was waiting for someone at the edge of a nearby clearing, and she could see him plainly from the window of her room.

Inspecting him closely, she decided that the officer was upset. He stared at his watch, peered up the road, and studied the watch again. Throwing a dark shawl over her head, Belle took up a coat and slipped out quietly.

"Why, hello Miss Belle." Harry Gilmor spoke casually as she came up.

She was disappointed because his tone was so perfunctory. They sparred conversationally for a few minutes until, folding her arms, she gave him a long look. "Let *me* take the message for you."

"What message?"

"The one in your pocket." He flashed a sudden grin, and said nothing. Belle went to work, arguing, almost pleading. "Well," Gilmor pondered. "The man who's supposed to take it hasn't arrived. Still . . . there's danger along the last stretch of road, the part that skirts Union territory."

"Give it to me. I can ride as well as any man you know," Belle cajoled. "A woman can get away with things a man can't." When the Captain laughed, she felt that his resistance had collapsed. Putting a cipher note into her hands, he said, "Six miles ahead, then take the road to the left for another two miles, and the first fence post on the hilltop, with the crossbar like a T. Our man will be under the trees. Repeat the directions, please."

After a run-through she let Gilmor help her into the saddle of

his horse, and cantered off. For a half hour she rode calmly, recognizing familiar markers and byroads along the slowly darkening earth. Soon, however, the way grew strange, and darkness fell. She had no reason to be panicky, she told herself. But in the still winter evening every slight sound crackled in her ears, and she shivered as a cold wind cut at her cheeks.

She found the rise that Gilmor had spoken of, and her heart thumped as she picked out the crossbar, outlined against the clouds.

At the bar something stirred—a tall man who put up his hand. From some distance away Belle called to him: "Hallo, hallo." The hand dropped, and as it did there came a flash and the whir of a bullet close to her head, and then two more. She could not tell from which direction the gun had been fired. Instinctively, however, she yanked at the reins and dropped against the horse's quivering back.

In the dim light the man's figure had disappeared. Not daring to move, Belle stayed in her crouched position. Could that be the Southern agent she was supposed to meet, or a Unionist who had heard of the rendezvous?

"Miss, please." The whisper was friendly. "Keep right there till I find what's what with that Yank." Belle, staring at the point from which the voice came, remained silent, motionless. A match flared a few feet away, and she saw a youth in Confederate uniform as he bent down. In the flash of light the girl made out something else—a limp figure with a bloodied chest, and only half a face.

The Southerner whistled in approval of his feat. "Did it real nice, didn't I?" In another moment he walked toward her. "You certainly was smart, miss, cryin' out like that and lettin' him know you was a girl. Threw him off balance. Another minute he'd have had you sighted good and shot you through."

Belle felt the perspiration roll down under the collar of her dress, though suddenly the night had a freezing quality. She gave a choked answer, handed over her paper, and took one in exchange. The soldier appeared to welcome a chance for a chat, but she wanted to get away at the first possible moment. She set off, praying as she went.

At the camp Gilmor anxiously awaited her. "I'm all right; don't worry." Belle shook her head and thrust the note into his hands.

With his thanks and praise in her ears she walked shakily to the house. As she climbed the stairs she was rehearsing the story she would tell Mary Boyd. . . .

Four more times Belle went on similar errands, without incident. Each time Captain Gilmor praised her and passed on Colonel Ashby's appreciation. She learned how to use a cipher—knowledge that would later be invaluable. Gilmor also gave her instruction in ways to gather information, to cope with unlooked-for developments.

She memorized her lessons: Always get the name of the military unit and commander. Find out where the officers and men expect to be sent, the place from which they have arrived, which scouts they have, and the scouts' whereabouts. . . . Try to provide an excuse for your presence, and give it casually.

During the winter Belle's father fell sick, and she and Mary nursed him for days. He recovered with the approach of early spring, and then they had another cause for concern. With good weather, they realized, military activity would pick up, and they could not expect to stay at Manassas.

On a bright morning early in 1862 her father brought them the news. "We're breaking camp, moving to a new place." His face grew more serious. "I'm afraid, girl, you'd best not go back home, either," he warned Belle. "The Union will be marching on Martinsburg again. And you'd better be elsewhere. They won't forget what you've done there already."

Ben had thought out the problem. "You'll be heading to your aunt and uncle's place at Front Royal. Grandma Glenn's there, you know." The Stewarts had taken over a hotel in the valley town, some forty miles from Martinsburg. Belle liked them, and for Grandma Glenn, her mother's mother, she had a special af-

fection. Yet Front Royal was so far from the center of things, so isolated! She would never get a chance for special work there.

5

FROM THE CARRIAGE window Belle stared moodily at the sharp slopes that encircled the village of Front Royal. For years she had come often over this route, looking forward to her stay in the little settlement that perched serenely like a bird in a protected nest. Today, however, the last thing she wanted was a peaceful retreat.

The horses strained up a steep hill, hurtled down an incline, and below them Front Royal spread along its clear and winding river. Around a turn in the road stood the hotel, with the family already lined up to greet her.

As the carriage ground to a halt, Grandma Glenn swept her into her arms, "Belle, you're no longer a tomboy—no, anything but that." When the older woman's eyes began to fill, she shook the tears away. "This isn't the time to be sentimental, though I'm sentimentalist enough to love a fine cry." She laughed instead, and called to two of the hotel servants, "Boys, carry Miss Belle's bags, and Adele, you be sure the hot water's brought upstairs."

As she conducted her granddaughter up the stairs to the big front bedroom, Mrs. Glenn gestured. "You can't claim you're cramped in this place—twenty-one rooms and only eight guests in the hotel."

Tilting her glasses up to the roots of her hair, Grandma went off and Alice, Belle's older cousin, came into the room. The eighteen-year-old girl had a pert prettiness. Some people considered Alice a fool, yet Belle knew that beneath the flood of talk the girl possessed a certain shrewdness.

"Here, Miss Belle." Frances held out the green woolen dress that she had just pressed in the hotel laundry. A moment later,

foraging about in the closet, the maid gave a cry of surprise. "Now, before the Lawd!" Over Frances' shoulder Belle peered at a hole, the size of a walnut, that had been cut through the floor. From the parlor below a circle of light shone up at them. "Somebody was real curious about the folks down there." Frances shook her head.

In the dining room Belle's aunt and uncle were bent intently over a newspaper. Looking up, Mr. Stewart spoke in a hushed voice. "The Yankees are coming closer than any of us realized—marching to Kernstown. Stonewall's regiment is near there, you know. Belle, I'm taking Mrs. Stewart and young Fannie to Richmond with me. I hope your family will understand if I leave you with Alice and your grandmother."

"Of course they'll understand," she reassured the distraught man, and jumped up to help with the packing.

With her cousin and Mrs. Glenn she watched from behind the shades of her hotel room a few days later as long lines of soldiers in blue swept by. The Confederates were retreating steadily down the valley, and Martinsburg had fallen once more to the Northern forces. All at once Belle determined to go home, if only to make sure that Mary and the children had not suffered.

"Very well," Mrs. Glenn nodded when Belle appealed to her. "If it will make you rest better, go there for a while. It shouldn't be too hard to get a pass from one Federal town to another."

The girl was cheerful and excited as she set out with Frances, pass in hand, for their transfer point at Winchester. There they settled gratefully in one of the railroad cars, and looked out at the crowds in the station.

Several Federal officers entered with a group of Southern prisoners, unshaven and woebegone. Belle was stunned when one of the Unionists stopped before her.

"Is this Miss Belle Boyd?"

She inclined her head, and he added, "I'm the Assistant Provost Marshal, and we have an order to detain you till your case is investigated. Will you leave the train?"

Surely this was a foolish error. Anxiously she drew out the

pass signed by the General at Front Royal. The young Captain glanced at the two conflicting documents, Belle's and the one he held. A bell rang, and in a minute or two the train would be under way. "Well"—he frowned—"I'll take the responsibility and bring you to Baltimore with the prisoners. General Dix can decide what's to be done."

Frances gaped, and for a moment Belle felt a numbing fear. Then she recalled several meetings at Washington parties with John Dix, who had remained with the Union. Now he was a kindly, white-haired officer with a reputation for leniency; she might fare far better with him than if she appeared here before some hostile stranger.

She faced the young man with a gently submissive smile, and tilted her head. "Captain, I suppose you'll put me behind bars?"

"Why, no." He grinned pleasantly. "You'll have to stay in your room at the hotel we assign you to. But you can have callers."

"And I can let people know I'm there?"

"I think so." The Captain hesitated. "We'll want to have, of course, the names of anybody you write to."

Belle hoped that he did not suspect her ever-increasing interest. Under the cover of Union control, she had often been told, Baltimore quivered with Confederate sentiment, and by now she was planning ways to turn this mischance to her advantage. . . .

Arrived at the hotel, Belle went at once to the desk in her richly furnished room. She remembered a former schoolmate and also a man supposedly important in pro-Southern activities. After a time several other likely names occurred to her, and to each she sent a carefully composed note. She simply requested them to call on a matter of "mutual concern."

For twenty-four hours Belle waited. Disconsolately she asked herself if she had been misled about Baltimore's Confederate sympathy.

The next day the soldier on guard before her door knocked, and indicated a bald, stoop-shouldered individual of uncertain

manner. "Mr. Jones. Will you see him?" The name was that of the lawyer rumored to be the town's leader of secret pro-Confederate operations. Yet could this slumped man be the right person?

Mr. Jones sat as far from the door as possible, evading her eyes and listening warily when she spoke about carrying messages between Virginia and Maryland. His pale lips finally opened. "Miss, I've heard of dealings of that sort, but that's all. Who did you say mentioned me to you?"

Exasperated, Belle decided to let the matter drop. If this timid rabbit was Baltimore's strong man, God help the Confederacy! Another half day passed, and now she received a group of girls, among them her former school friend. As her callers giggled foolishly over tea, she felt an impulse to shake them.

Then, with a quick glance at the door, Belle's old friend suddenly leaned toward her and whispered, "Mr. Jones has finished inquiring about you and he sends you a message. It wouldn't be safe for him to come back here again. So listen: when you're in Front Royal again, see these Southern agents—Mrs. Hilton, Mr. Mulheeny, Mr. Archer . . ." Astonished, Belle listened intently as the girl gave five or six names. "And don't trust the Brazelmans; they've been taking our information and giving it to the Union. If you get to Richmond, call on these . . ."

For fifteen minutes Belle exchanged whispered confidences with her callers. By the time the maid arrived to remove the teacups, the group was talking innocently of the Baltimore theater.

When a summons came from General Dix, she put on her least-sophisticated dress, a simple white silk. One of her favorite red roses for her hair, a mere hint of perfume, and she walked out with the guard. Entering the General's office, she looked down with hands clasped as if to prevent a threatened break in her self-control.

"Come, my dear. You're surely not afraid of me?" the gray-haired officer asked tactfully.

"No." Belle's glance was shy. "But, sir, what do they have

against me? I've done nothing. Except when that thug hurt my mother." While she related her story, Belle succeeded in getting a good look at the General's desk pad; it had only a few words opposite her name. They must have little that was specific against her.

"So." General Dix pressed his finger tips together. "This is a time of war, child, and a civilian can injure a government just as a soldier may—under certain conditions, injure it even more. You've been indiscreet, and several people have reported your remarks. You'd be well advised to guard your feelings, avoiding even the apeparance of wrongdoing. Will you do that?"

She said she certainly would. Whatever she did, she would guard appearances from now on! "Then I can go back to my family in Virginia?" The fatherly General assured her that she could, and smiled benignly as she walked out. The pass in her pocket, Belle quit Baltimore that same afternoon. She wanted to lose no more time in starting work again.

A few days later, soon after evening had settled over Front Royal, Belle arrived with Frances at the family hotel. Wretchedly tired, she bit her lips in dismay at the sight before her.

The little building had changed, and drastically. Nearly every window shone with light. Her woman's eye noted that most of the curtains had been removed, and uniformed men lounged around the porch. Obviously the Federal forces had taken over the hotel, and what would she and Frances do now?

From the shadows a plump figure materialized. "Child, isn't it fine that you're back with us!" Grandma Glenn's laugh rang out so reassuringly that Belle almost cried in relief. While the soldiers gaped, her grandmother helped her through the hallway to the old cottage in the rear courtyard. "We find space a trifle short these days," she said with lifted eyebrows as she threw open the windows in the narrow upper chamber that Belle would occupy with Alice.

Belle glanced from the faded floral patterns on the walls to the four-poster bed. "It will be comfortable, more than comfortable," Belle nodded. The chamber window dominated the courtyard, with a view of the rear porch and part of the hall of the main building. This might prove quite an observation point.

As she joined Alice and Mrs. Glenn for biscuits and milk, the blond cousin promptly took over the conversation. "General Shields is in charge and nobody can say he hasn't behaved nicely, considering. The soldiers are boisterous, but they let us alone. . ." Already Belle had heard enough to determine her next step. Within the hour she had sent a card ahead and gone toward the big downstairs room which was now the General's office.

Middle-aged, big-mustachioed General Shields had a forthright geniality. He indicated a chair and said with an amused air, "Miss Boyd, you do move around."

"Not quite as much as you, sir." This reference to the General's military activities made him grin, and she thought she had found a clue to the man, a way to reach him. Meanwhile two younger officers had jumped to their feet, bowing deferentially. Acknowledging the introductions, Belle got down to business, first to learn the situation here, and next to explore the possibility of an eventual transfer to Richmond itself. . . . "They decided at Baltimore that I'm no danger to the Union," she explained casually. "I've been thinking of going to Richmond, with your permission."

General Shields's eyes twinkled. "Ah, young lady. Old Jackson's army is in that direction, and it's so demoralized I wouldn't trust you to its mercies."

Belle gave him an artless look. "So, I can't go at all?"

"Oh yes." The General expanded. "We'll wipe 'em out in a few days, and then you can go if you like."

Though he spoke with humor and perhaps for effect, she became certain that decisive military action was in the offing. The interview went well; Belle felt when she rose no matter what Shields had or had not heard about her, she would probably not be subjected to close surveillance.

Alice had gone to bed when she returned, and Belle talked

quietly to Mrs. Glenn. "I need some information about a few people in town. You won't mention this to anybody?" Intrigued, the bright-eyed old woman ran over the names whispered to Belle by the Baltimoreans. If she wondered about her grand-daughter's interest in these individuals, Mrs. Glenn did not show it.

Belle retired happily; she had found an ally. In the morning she made quick work of breakfast and pulled on her bonnet. At the sight of a sentry she had a qualm of fear; would she have as much freedom as she had expected? Going by with a confident air, she listened intently for a command to stop. He was watching her now. . . . Walk slowly she told herself. After what seemed an hour, she heard him turn back toward the hotel.

Her breath came easily again as she strolled down the street, parasol shielding her face. She started for the first house on her list, only to draw up short. A sentry stood at the door. The man who lived there must have been trapped; she had to be even more circumspect than she had realized.

Retracing her steps as though she had forgotten something, she headed for the next stop on her route. After she had knocked several times, she was greeted by a plainly dressed matron. "Yes, I'm Mrs. Hilton," the woman said, and remained stiffly inhospitable, her fingers holding tightly to the edge of the dingy door.

Gingerly Belle mentioned several names of Baltimore friends. It could be risky to tell so much to a stranger; yet she had to take the chance to make some contact with others in this work. She talked swiftly, describing her previous activities and the information she had received in Maryland. The red-rimmed eyes softened a little and Mrs. Hilton stepped back in silence. As Belle entered the parlor, the woman breathed heavily, "I'm glad you're here. This place is split apart, Miss Boyd, split badly; we have to watch everything we do or we may be turned in, both of us." As Mrs. Hilton told everything she knew, Belle studied the almost emaciated face, the cheerless eyes behind heavy glasses. Several times Mrs. Hilton's mouth quivered; after a time the girl decided that the movement was a nervous twitch, and she tried not to stare.

"Now," Belle rose, "isn't there some Confederate officer near here, to receive anything I find?"

"I've heard Colonel Ashby is hiding somewhere."

Belle's pulse quickened. "If I get something vital, who's the closest person to pass it to?"

The older woman appeared to debate the matter, then whispered, "Mr. Merritt—about fourteen miles out, the red house with the chimneys, past the third fork out on the right." As if she had said too much, Mrs. Hilton closed her lips tightly and Belle said good-by.

The rest of the day was spent in maintaining a watch on Union activities from her window. As she sat behind the curtains her grandmother approached with an almost eager air. "Belle, this isn't what your mother would like, and I'm not sure I'm doing the right thing. But I can add one and one, and I know what you were up to before you got here." The old eyes sparkled more than usual.

"Anyway, you remember the big parlor at the front of the hotel. They hold their meetings there. Had one last week, and now I hear there'll be another soon." Before Belle could answer, Mrs. Glenn shook her head. "Now, child, don't tell me too much. In fact, don't tell me anything, and then I won't be able to object—or think I should stop you!"

When Grandma Glenn had hitched her glasses back in place and departed, Belle mulled over this latest information. With guards stationed everywhere, how could she possibly overhear that meeting? Suddenly it came to her—the room above the parlor, the one she had occupied on her previous visit, with the hole in the cupboard floor. Still, that choice chamber would certainly be occupied. . . .

Until bedtime she revolved the problem in her mind. When she lay beside Alice, she decided it was time to enlist her cousin. At Belle's first words Alice sat up in bed.

"We've got a way, an excuse for you to be upstairs in the hotel," she interrupted, the words tumbling out. "The Union Army provides its own rations, but our staff cleans the rooms, supplies towels and linen for the officers. Now and then, when

the servants are too busy, I've gone in and out with fresh supplies. Don't you see?" Lighting the lamp beside them, Alice slipped over to the cupboard. "Keep some of these towels on hand. At the right time, just throw them over your arm, and you're ready!"

From then on, Alice became an adept aide, keeping note of happenings at the hotel, watching for the arrival of military couriers.

Two days later, stepping out of the cottage in the morning, Belle sensed tension. When she went through the hotel hallway, she saw staff officers moving at an unusual rate; down the street a company of men marched with swift precision.

Behind her she heard a determined step, and her name was called in a high-pitched voice of unusual penetration: "You're Miss Belle Boyd?"

The man in civilian clothes, ruddy-faced and pencil-thin, had a look and accent that she placed as English. "I trust this isn't too much of an intrusion," he smiled as he scrutinized her. "I'm G. W. Clarke, correspondent of the New York *Herald*, and I'm doing a bit of battle coverage and other matters for my paper. Long before I got in last night, people told me about you, Miss Boyd."

Belle stood silent, studying the man as he studied her. His light eyes held a quick, probing intelligence; there was something sly and subtle in his manner, hinting of things he did not say. She began to dislike Mr. Clarke very much. In any case, he was a Northern journalist, someone to avoid.

He answered her unspoken question. "You see, I'm writing several passages on Western Virginia mountain country, and I understand you know it well."

The correspondent started to walk along with her, putting one query after another about mountain passes and roads, until Belle entered the cottage with a final shake of her head. As she slammed the door her uneasiness increased; here was an individual she would have to guard against.

She stayed close to the cottage, trying to keep track of what was happening in and about the hotel. She was ready for

Grandma Glenn's murmured words: "The servants say something big is going to happen tonight—a staff meeting, I gather." After supper Mrs. Glenn retired early, and Belle was grateful. Tonight the field should be hers. And yet she remembered her grandmother's air, the hint in her eyes; she would use caution.

Going to the darkened upstairs room, Belle did not undress, but sat at the window with Alice.

"The meeting's at 9:30," Alice reminded her. Shortly after that time Belle crept down and crossed the courtyard, the towels under her arm. At the end of the long downstairs hall she saw two guards in conversation; silently she walked to the rear stairs and ascended. If they noticed her, they gave no sign.

She hurried on and paused at the door of the big room. Should she knock? A light rap brought no answer; someone might be sleeping there, but she had to go in anyway. She turned the knob, opened the door a crack. Apparently a man had just left; clothes were tossed over the bed, and the room had the smell of soap and shaving lather. Slipping inside, Belle suddenly asked herself, Suppose somebody had filled the hole in the floor? In a rush of apprehension she swung open the door. Yes, there was the opening, a golden penny shining in the dim light. She caught a rumbling voice, and putting her ear to the hole, heard as clearly as if she sat in the conference.

Belle memorized each name, each reference to a direction, an objective. At first she missed precise meanings as she concentrated on officers' titles and geographical points. Then gradually she began to understand: this was the route to be taken tomorrow; those were the forces and their points of meeting. . . . Half an hour passed, an hour, and she lost all track of time.

She heard a footstep in the hall outside the room. Her breath caught. Were the occupants returning? Downstairs chairs scraped; she had to leave, and quickly!

With an effort Belle got to her feet and made her way to the door. There she paused, shivering with apprehension, her head against the crack. Someone was just outside.

After a moment the person moved on. She waited as long as

she dared, opened the door an inch. Nobody there now . . . Her breath stopping, she sped along the passage and down the back stairs.

As she entered the cottage she saw that the clock showed one o'clock. In her room, while Alice watched in rapt silence, Belle worked hastily, setting down in cipher everything she remembered—points, places, titles. After a while Alice murmured, "I guess you'll send it on in the morning?" Belle gave her cousin a penetrating look. "I'm taking it myself, now."

Finishing the cipher note, Belle threw on a light coat and went out, closing the door softly behind her. Threading the path to the stables, she saddled the horse and set out for the house of Mr. Merritt, mentioned by her confederate, Mrs. Hilton.

At the last moment Belle had thrust into her pocket several passes brought by a fidgety woman neighbor. She rode swiftly out of the village, into the hilly outskirts. A dark shape loomed, a hand lifted, and reluctantly she drew in the reins. As the young sentry squinted at her and put his question, she recalled one of the lessons she had learned: "Say as little as you can. . . . When in doubt, act unscared."

With a smile Belle bent forward and pressed a pass into the boy's hand. He frowned at the unreadable scrawl, nodded, and let her go. In a sweat she urged on the horse. She panted heavily, and her horse was well winded by the time she halted at the gate of the big house close to the road.

Red brick with three chimneys . . . She must have the right place, the Merritt homestead. Not a light showed, and she knocked several times, pounded on the door, and kicked with her shoe tip. After a while a woman's voice reached her from a window above: "Who is it?"

"Belle Boyd. I have something important for Colonel Ashby." There followed a long pause. "Wait a minute, please."

The door opened, and Mrs. Merritt drew her into the chill house. "My dear, where did you come from?"

"From Front Royal," Belle said impatiently. "I've got to see Colonel Ashby right away."

As Mrs. Merritt went to the table to light the lamp, a door opened behind her and there was Ashby himself.

"Good God. Miss Belle, is that really you?"

He wore a cotton robe, open at the neck. When she saw the dark eyes, hooded with sleep, and the thin lips, half open in surprise; Belle recalled the name that suited him so well, the Black Knight.

Then she remembered her purpose and began to talk volubly, telling everything she had overheard at the conference.

Turner Ashby listened, and presently he motioned her to a chair. He asked several questions, and had her repeat parts of the message. At last he sat back, and his eyes were now vividly alive, darting back and forth in his concentration. His hand drumming on the arm of the chair, he spoke emphatically. "Good, Miss Belle. Very good. You've done it this time."

In Ashby's face Belle read the suggestion of a smile, the only such hint she had ever seen there. Reluctantly she rose. "I've got to go back. It took me two hours to ride here, and if I'm not home by morning, the whole story will be out."

Ashby agreed, and at the door he held out his hand. As he took hers in both of his, she felt his pulsing strength, and again she was caught by the proud power of the man. With an effort she turned and ran down the steps. When she rode off, her last sight was of Ashby, lean and dark, in the doorway.

6

FOR YEARS Belle remembered the following week as a time of waiting, of tension that increased with each day.

Silence settled over Front Royal, a pause with the drowsiness of a siesta. In mid-May the heat rose from the dusty streets in wavering breaths.

The next morning a slow, uneven rain began to fall; gutters filled and streets turned to sticky mud. Gradually the clouds

scudded by and though the showers let up, the sky pressed like an ugly gray bowl upon the town. In early afternoon Belle sat reading a Richmond letter. Outside from the courtyard came the slow sweep of Frances' broom over the bricks. The scraping stopped. Belle heard the broom drop and the girl's heavy steps hurrying up the stairs.

"I think the rebels comin'! Yankees makin' an awful fuss on the street!" Frances' mouth was agape.

Belle darted down; whatever had happened must have happened awfully fast. Running through the hall, she found a frightened guard before the office; outside, forty or fifty men moved in confusion, shouting questions, giving orders that nobody heeded.

Belle caught sight of a lieutenant she had met several times, and cried to him, "What's going on?"

Much rattled, he stared at first as if he had not heard her. Then he answered swiftly, "It's the Confederates, under Jackson and Ewell. They surprised our outside pickets and got within a mile of town before we knew it. . . ." The Lieutenant looked harassed. "Now we're trying to get the ordnance and quarter-master's stores out of reach."

As he called a direction to several privates, Belle seized his sleeve. "What will you do with the supplies in the big depot?"

"Burn 'em, of course." He talked under a kind of nervous compulsion, and Belle took advantage of the stress of the moment. When he turned impatiently away, she asked a last question: "Suppose the rebels get here too fast?"

He hesitated. "Well, we'll fight as long as we can put up a front. If we have to, we'll retreat on Winchester to General Banks's men and burn the bridges behind us!"

As if he were talking to himself, the Lieutenant walked off. Belle quickly analyzed the situation. She had to reach Jackson with this indication of Union plans. If he knew these facts precisely, and the situation ahead of him at Front Royal, he could smash and upset the entire Union scheme!

Belle heard distant rifle fire, the beat of drums. From the

valley outside town, where the Federal camp lay, bugles sounded and resounded, with a note of growing urgency. As she turned back to the hotel, there came a clattering racket, like a man falling down the front stairs. It was her bête noire, the newspaperman Clarke. "What's going on?" he asked breathlessly.

"Nothing to speak of." Despite her own haste Belle enjoyed the moment. "Just the rebels, Mr. Clarke, and you'd better get ready for prison in Richmond."

The correspondent gave her a look of hate and clambered back up the steps. Over at the cottage Belle gave staccato replies to Alice's questions. "I'm not sure of anything, dear; I'm trying to find out." Digging in a drawer, she snatched up her notes and also the opera glasses she had brought from Washington City; she might be able to make out what was going on at the village outskirts.

She climbed the stairs to the front balcony of the inn. On the way she had to pass Clarke's open door; his back to her, the man was grabbing handfuls of his precious manuscripts and shoving them into a bag. The sight reminded her of all the hostile things the correspondent must have written about her. The door key remained in his lock, on the outside. How could she resist the temptation? She could not. Drawing the door shut, she quietly locked it and slipped the key in her pocket.

From the porch Belle trained her glasses toward the edge of town, and her heart skipped a beat. There, about three quarters of a mile off, she saw what must be the first of the Confederates, halted for the moment. Ben Boyd must be somewhere among those men, she thought with a pang of fear, and also Colonel Ashby and his unit. If only she could get her information to them! A sunbonnet lay on the hall table and she pulled it on.

She barely heard Clarke's furious thumping as she slipped down the stairs and out the front door. In a moment she was racing away, weaving through the scattered, confused soldiers. Let one of these Unionists try to stop her!

Up ahead she heard the crackle of rifles, the pounding of heavier guns. The Federals had set up their artillery on a high

hill overlooking the road, and skirmishing had begun between the outposts. Belle cut through a small field, dodging from one patch of trees and shrubs to the next.

A moment later she half heard, half felt a whir overhead; the Union pickets were firing at her! A rifle ball hit the ground almost at her feet, splattering soft earth into her face. She looked down; one had cut through her skirt. A tan haze was settling around her; for the rest of her life she would never smell smoke without thinking of this day. Finally she approached the Confederates; a few yards from the forward line she waved her bonnet. The men, astonished at the sight of a woman at this point, broke into a cheer.

Now the pain in her side was agonizing; stumbling, she sank to her knees. When she looked up, she recognized with a happy surprise a familiar face, that of a family connection, the young Major Henry Douglas.

Major Douglas' expression was one of amazement.

"Belle, what are you doing here?"

"Let me catch my breath." Then the words poured out and she told him the placement of the forces, the heavy supplies, the size of the Union army at Front Royal, all the plans she knew. "Their guns cover the railroad bridge, not the wagon bridge, on the opposite side of town. If you can get right there soon, you can save them before they burn."

Douglas rode off a little and her pulse quickened as she made out the officer with whom he spoke, the bearded Stonewall. Jackson stared toward her earnestly and rode over. She looked up again, repeating the information she had given his subordinate. Though the General revealed little emotion, she saw a tightening about the eyes, a look of decision that strengthened as he listened. "Would you like a horse and escort back home, Miss Belle?"

"No. I'll go the way I came." The girl turned to the excited Major Douglas. "I've got to hurry. My love to the boys; and if we meet in town, you haven't seen me today." The way back was easier; near the village edge she faced around. Young Doug-

las was still in sight and she waved once more, with no thought of danger.

The Confederates charged with new energy. They would have to make their way to the bridges on the other side of the town. Belle heard the report of rifles, the growing boom of big guns as she stood with Alice and Mrs. Glenn behind the curtains of the now empty hotel. A last few Union men raced up the street.

Then past the hotel galloped the first of the gray cavalry. Belle was suddenly dizzy; for a few minutes she rested on the sofa, and her grandmother put cool cloths on her forehead. From the window Alice said, "A funny thing happened about Mr. Clarke. We found a rope hanging from his window, and nobody's seen him since." Belle was too tired to laugh or explain; already that episode seemed far in the past. . . .

On the second day news arrived—astonishing, electrifying news. Jackson had reached General Banks, smashed his column in half and chased it in a wild rout to the banks of the Potomac!

Belle felt a burst of joy. Only a few days ago disaster had pressed upon them, and now, almost overnight, the prospect looked good again. . . . There were shouts everywhere of "Stonewall, Stonewall," and even some of the Union papers were paying indirect tribute to his fantastic feats.

"We've never had a soldier like that one, never!"
"If they'd only give us two or three more Jacksons . . ."
A day later a dusty soldier delivered a letter:

Miss Belle Boyd,

I thank you, for myself and for the army, for the immense service you have rendered our country today. Hastily, I am your friend, T. J. Jackson, C.S.

Her eyes shining, she put the note away. The war's course had changed, and she had had a part in changing it.

# Part Two

## PRISON BARS

". . . the most persistent Rebel the Old Capitol ever had."

-SUPERINTENDENT WILLIAM WOOD

7

FROM A LINE of windows along Front Royal's main street men, women, and children leaned out to shout, wave, and call to the long files of blue-clad soldiers who tramped steadily past. On this early June evening of 1862, the Union was parading its strength, and some of the villagers raced to proclaim their true faith, while others shook their heads sadly or angrily, and still others merely stared in bewilderment.

It was a time of careful watching, of neighbor on guard against neighbor. In the shadowed side yard of one of the big houses a general's aide listened intently to an informer who murmured one name after another.

Belle stood with her grandmother and Cousin Alice behind the front curtains at the hotel, watching the crowd disperse. She turned to them abruptly when a file of Union men approached the lower door and a cluster of onlookers gathered to see what would follow.

"Well, it's starting already," Belle said, sounding calmer than she felt, and the three women went down to the ground floor. She remained coldly silent when a solemn young officer entered the hallway. "They say you're Belle Boyd."

Her eyes did not waver. "They've said correctly."

"You're to be confined here, and may not leave without written permission. Orders of General Kimball."

At breakfast the next morning a rap sounded, and Belle looked up in surprise. "Why, it's General Shields!"

Their easygoing friend of a short time ago beamed at all of them. Despite his unhappy showing in Jackson's campaign, the graying officer appeared to have recovered his composure. How much had he learned of her work? Belle studied him closely as they chatted, but could detect no signs of resentment. "Oh, don't let me disturb you, ladies." With a smile Shields lifted his hand. "I'm back here for a time, anyway, and they told me about last night's orders concerning you. A new man's mistake. You have your freedom as before, Miss Belle. Provided you don't abuse it, of course."

With a twinkling eye the Irishman went off. Puzzled at the sudden change in her status, Belle turned to her grandmother. "He's always been pretty lackadaisical. Still . . . do you think they're giving me enough rope to hang myself?" Mrs. Glenn's eyes widened in alarm and Belle, shivering slightly at her own words, decided that for the time being she must be very circumspect.

Then slowly she became aware of a curious constraint in the room. "What's the matter?" she asked with a frown.

Alice looked down and labored over her embroidery. When Belle's glance went to her grandmother, Mrs. Glenn answered in a low, deliberate voice. "Child, for the last twenty-four hours I've been worried about this—this strange newspaper account." She held out a recent journal and Belle, mystified, started to read a long account: "From Williamsport, Correspondence of the Associated Press."

It seemed at first to be merely a story of Jackson's great successes. She finished a paragraph, another, and then:

"At the hotel in Front Royal, on the night of the 18th, your correspondent saw an accomplished prostitute who has figured

largely in the rebel cause; and having seen her but a short time previously at Martinsburg, her presence at Front Royal, at a time when the rebels were surrounding it, induced suspicions that she meant mischief. It is now known that she was the bearer of an extensive correspondence between the rebels, inside and outside of our lines . . ." The article ended: "Your correspondent cannot vouch for the strict accuracy of all the foregoing—but undeniable proof exists here of her treason." Though he could not "vouch" for it, he had still said it.

As Alice and Mrs. Glenn looked away in embarrassment, Belle laughed. "Any Southerner knows how these Yankee rags lie."

Although Belle could laugh, there was a heavy feeling in her throat. The whole village must have read that article; it might be best not to leave the inn until the subject faded in interest. Then she went abruptly to the closet for her hat; she had no intention of skulking like a criminal.

Going down the street, Belle searched the faces around her. An elderly man walked up, smiled, and put out his hand. "Miss Belle, we're proud of you." She felt a twinge of hurt, however, when a Confederate sympathizer nodded distantly and did not stop. Obviously Mrs. Palfrey believed what she read.

In the cottage doorway Mrs. Glenn awaited her. "Belle," her grandmother began with a catch in her voice, "you know that Colonel Ashby joined Jackson over at Winchester and did very well in the fighting?"

"Yes, yes." Belle sensed bad news in the air. "Where is he now?"

Her grandmother's eyes darkened. "After that he led his men against a Union band during Jackson's retreat. And they shot him down."

"Is he near here?"

"Belle, you don't understand." Mrs. Glenn led her into the parlor. "He died near the spot, a few days back."

There must be a mistake; it couldn't have happened, Belle thought. Slowly she climbed to her room, and before her eyes

was the image of the dark-faced man, eyes glowing as he absorbed her message.

As June progressed the women in the cottage behind the hotel felt a rising of the war fever. Two Union ambulances rolled into the courtyard and new military patients were brought into the hotel. Mrs. Glenn started to help at once and Belle and Alice followed her. Some were hopeless cases; Belle sat for two hours beside a youth sadly watching him sink away. As she held one of his hands, she wondered if she would ever get over the effects of the suffering and death she had seen that year.

Finally an attendant removed the white-sheeted figure, and a deep voice reached her from the next bed: "You handled that well, Miss Boyd. I'm a doctor, you know."

Until then she had paid little heed to the big, somewhat ungainly man at the other side. He appeared to be about fifty; a large-domed forehead, receding hairline, and prominent nose made her think of an eagle. The smile was assured. "I'm Dr. Rand. It didn't take me long to place a celebrity like you."

His tone was slightly satiric, but as Belle turned away his approach changed abruptly. "Please, I intended no offense. This bandage is too tight, and I hoped you could redo it." Seeing his contrite look, Belle went to work. Only when she finished did she realize that the wrapping had needed no care at all. Dr. Rand smiled again. "Don't blame me. I wanted a little attention too." His expression was so disarming that she relaxed for a moment. "Now I do have to go," she insisted, but pleasantly, and walked away.

For the rest of the week she seldom entered the sickroom without having a word with the doctor-patient. Belle had never met anyone quite like him. He was a man of high education, with an easy command of words; he referred to his estate at home in Illinois, his wide practice, his medical experiences. She enjoyed his talk of books and travels and ultimately of the war. It turned out that Dr. Rand knew many Southerners of prewar days and he spoke of them without bitterness.

They talked of the current campaigns, and all at once Belle realized that her new friend was telling far more than she had learned from most Union officers. She did not prod; without a hint or suggestion from her he mentioned the position of regiments, the regrouping of units. Discreetly she studied the long face, the pale gray eyes. Could he be saying all this for a purpose? Her suspicion was wrong, Belle decided. In such matters a medical officer might be naturally less careful than a regular military man.

Belle rushed to her room to put down all of this data. Her supply of information grew steadily, and she began to consider ways to pass it on. The doctor's leg wound improved; after a few days he could move about with a cane, and Belle helped him to the latticed edge of the back porch.

During his first hour there the patient suddenly interrupted their talk of his travels in Europe to ask, "Belle, have you ever been in my state?"

"No." She tilted her head at the question. "Would I like Abe Lincoln's home state?"

"I think you would, and I'll show it to you someday. Belle, I'd like to take you back to Illinois after the war."

She tried to smile. "They wouldn't want a rebel like me."

The doctor's fingers sought hers. "They would when they knew you the way I do." He added quickly, "You see, Belle, I want to marry you."

The girl was silent at first. She had received the first proposal of her life, she told herself, and her main emotion was surprise, and also pity. . . . He was pleading now. "Think about it, my dear, and we can talk later." Drawing her hands from his, she said good-by gently and returned to the cottage.

The next morning, when she met the doctor again, he felt stronger and she accompanied him on a walk. He did not mention their last conversation. Again he dropped several interesting bits of military intelligence, and these she entered into her records. Soon she would have enough for a long message.

Two days later, when they sat together on the porch, Dr.

Rand asked her softly, "Haven't you something to tell me, Belle?"

As he tried to read the meaning in her eyes, his longing prompted her to say something. "Well . . . we can see about it later. If things work out and you feel the same way when the war's over—well . . ." Belle threw back her head and smiled. Vague though her words sounded, they appeared to satisfy him. When he bent forward deferentially to kiss her, she felt a sense of guilt. Was she acting fairly, or taking too great an advantage of the man for her own purposes?

About to speak again, Belle made herself think of Jackson's army, of her father, and the other men in it. They needed every bit of help she could give them, and she intended to do whatever seemed likely to benefit her side. With that she pushed her doubts aside.

8

ONE DAY in late July of '62—for years the date would be a firm memory—Belle glanced into the yard, toward the new Union flag tent in which the Provost Marshal issued passes. What she saw stirred her concern and speculation. Before the tent waited two men in nondescript costume that indicated the Confederate Army. In these days an occasional Southerner, well attended, was paroled to go South.

If she were careful, might one of these men take her new information and get it into the proper hands? It was certainly a possibility, and she studied the pair with quickening interest. The older one, slack-jawed, careless, looked like a gawking oaf. The other was neat, trim, with a cleft chin and light blond beard. The brown eyes were steady, and when they fell on her, with a penetrating stare, Belle felt her cheeks flush slightly.

This man was no fool. As he started away, Belle went to Mrs. Glenn and began to talk of her plan.

"Girl, you know I haven't objected to most of the things you've done." Her grandmother was troubled. "But the Union people may be watching this boy mighty closely. And if it didn't work out he might suffer, and you as well."

"It will work out. Trust my judgment, Grandma."

For a few more minutes Mrs. Glenn argued, but finally she accompanied Belle to the Marshal's quarters. "Well, no." That official shook his head. "I guess there's no rule against having him for dinner." He gave the name: "Captain Charles Small, staying down the street with the Royalls."

The dinner went well. Belle found herself drawn more and more to Captain Small. Was it his strong masculinity or the admiring attention that he paid her; or—she paused—the challenge in his brown eyes? Her grandmother was also visibly pleased. Only Alice continued to regard their caller with an enigmatic air, and Belle wondered why.

A bit later when the Captain got to his feet and thanking them took his leave, Belle had a sudden sense of loss; suppose she never saw Charles Small again?

Without knowing quite how it happened Belle found herself standing outside the door with the Captain. He murmured, "The Royalls are giving a small party the day after tomorrow, my last one here. I—I've already asked if you're invited, and they said yes. You'll be there, won't—won't you?"

His eyes were begging for her answer. She had already planned to go but, alas, with Dr. Rand. Captain Small's voice dropped lower. "I'd certainly like it—if you came."

Belle forgot everything except that she wanted to be with him. As she whispered her agreement, she thought of something else. She had planned to wait before asking him to help her transmit the new message. But all at once she asked, "When you go to the Southern lines, couldn't you take a note to General Jackson?"

In the dim light the young officer's eyes widened. "Of course, if you wanted me to."

"Well . . . we'll see." The Captain's hand touched hers,

moved along her arm, and suddenly he was much closer. They heard a noise at the window, as the maid Frances closed a shutter. With a quick nod Captain Small left her. Alice glanced up when Belle came in. "What do you think of him?" Belle inquired.

"I don't know." Her cousin had a musing look. "He seems—well, just a bit too friendly and obliging."

The next evening Belle transferred her notes to a cipher message and put it into her purse. With Frances' silent help she changed to a soft blue muslin dress and added a half circle of roses to her hair.

Dr. Rand awaited her, as previously arranged, and Belle's first glance told her he had heard something that did not please him. Could she have expected that he would not learn about Captain Small? The doctor spoke in a clipped, overpolite way.

She had been wondering more and more about the evening's party. Mrs. Royall, in spite of her Southern ties, invited all elements to her home. Belle usually went to her affairs; from the Union officers who attended she learned a great deal. For her, however, this particular party might be more than a little difficult. She and Dr. Rand arrived in icy mood, and the moment Belle entered and left the doctor's side, Captain Small walked toward her.

"I was—was afraid you'd change your mind," he told her softly, and his look was caressing. Glancing around, Belle saw that it was a curious group of people: Union officers, two young married couples of the town, several unattached girls.

"Miss Belle, will you favor us?" Standing before her, a Federal officer indicated the piano. With a bright nod she accepted the invitation; as she adjusted the stool, Belle was seized by an impulse. She might regret it, but she would enjoy the moment.

She struck a chord, swept Dr. Rand and the other Union men with her glance, and sang, loudly, clearly, the first words of "The Bonnie Blue Flag." At the sound of the defiant Southern song she saw backs stiffen, and Dr. Rand's face go white with

anger. Immediately Captain Small stood at her side, and his voice blended with hers.

If Belle's heart had not gone out to him entirely before, then, it did as they sang. Finishing the chorus, she stared up and in his eyes she read the same look that had stirred her before, as though Charles dared her to show her own emotion. This time the softening of her face, the parting of her lips gave him her answer.

She told herself that all of the others must sense what had happened, and she did not care. With an air of slight embarrassment Mrs. Royall led the Captain away, and Dr. Rand said harshly to Belle, "Please. I've got to talk to you in the next room." In the other chamber Dr. Rand seemed unable to speak at first. His words, when they came, had a painful intensity.

"Belle, you're acting like a fool. I heard today that that fellow's a Union soldier, not a Confederate." He put his hand on her shoulder.

She pushed him away. "Do you expect me to believe a lie like that?" As she returned to the parlor, Captain Small awaited her.

"Would you like to go?" The Captain's voice was tenderly sympathetic.

The girl stared around. "Yes, and right now." After what had happened she had no intention of returning home with Dr. Rand. She made quiet adieus to the intrigued Mrs. Royall and the other guests. The night was overcast, and in the shadows Charles's arm tightened against hers.

A few steps from the cottage Charles halted. Before Belle could speak, he had drawn her against him. His lips touched her cheek and then hungrily her mouth and throat. As her head sank back, she felt the lift and fall of his chest, the hard strength of his arms. "My darling," he murmured.

He kissed her once more, and slowly she released herself. Reaching into her purse, she lifted out the thin paper on which she had written her note to Jackson.

When Belle gave him the folded sheet, she pressed his hand. "You'll be sure to deliver it? You promise?"

He nodded emphatically. "And I'll come back here as soon as I can, Belle." She leaned against him for a moment, turned, and hurried into the cottage.

With dawn she woke suddenly from an uneasy rest, and swift doubts and questions swarmed about her. Swinging her legs to the side, she wiped nervously at her face with a wet cloth and pulled on her clothes. Downstairs she slipped out of the cottage past a young sentry, who grinned as she went by. Through the empty streets she hastened toward the Royall house, the tap of her heels echoing in the stillness.

Belle knocked several times at the door before Mrs. Royall's drowsy face appeared. "I'm sorry," the girl murmured to the startled woman. "I've got to talk to Captain Small, about something urgent."

"Of course," Mrs. Royall murmured, and led Belle to the same room in which the party had been held the previous evening. Before long Charles entered the chamber. "Belle, is—is something wrong?"

Crying, she told him the things Dr. Rand had said. They were alone, and the Captain took her to him. "Don't—don't believe it. None of it's true, Belle, none." They stayed together for a time. "I'll be back, Belle." He kissed the palms of her hands.

"But when?"

"Soon, very soon. I'll—I'll write you tomorrow, wherever I am, and no matter what happens. Wait for me."

"I'll wait; of course I'll wait." A final kiss, and, reassured, Belle almost ran out. . . . For the rest of the day she remained in or near her room. Again and again she recalled the previous night, the way his hands held her arms so tightly that they hurt, the pressure of his mouth on her cheek and neck and lips.

The twenty-four hours that followed were worse than she would have thought possible. What had Charles said about writing? "No matter what happened . . ." And still no word had arrived. Toward dusk Alice knocked and as Belle read the compassion in her face she turned angrily away; she wanted nobody's sympathy.

Her cousin sat on the edge of the bed. "Belle, I wish I didn't have to say this." Alice's voice was low, uncertain. "But you may have to do something about it, and quickly. I saw Dr. Rand just now, and he's found out more than he knew yesterday. He's had to be careful, the way he's asked about these things. Anyway . . ." The blond girl paused and raced on: "Captain Small is a Unionist, an army scout, and his name is Smitley."

The last detail struck Belle with a special pain. He hadn't even given his real name! Suddenly she understood what a mistake, what a series of mistakes, she had made. She lay back, her eyes closed, her mouth tightly shut in bitter unhappiness.

The next morning passed slowly, grimly. As she lay on the sofa she saw Dr. Rand coming toward the cottage. She didn't want to talk to him; she couldn't. Yet suppose he had valuable information for her? When he knocked, she met him at the front door.

"Miss Belle!" The doctor's face was powder-white. "There's something going on at headquarters. I'm not sure of everything, but I've heard enough to say this: You ought to leave Front Royal the first minute you can, before a flat order arrives from above. You told me once that you'd been thinking of going to Richmond. I've inquired, and if you apply now, you might get a pass in a day or two, by Thursday anyway."

Belle's heart raced. This man had taken great risks for her, and what he told her was vital to her safety. More than ever she owed him a deep gratitude; she wanted to let him know, too, how sorry she was that things had worked out as they had. . . . She tried to speak, but no words came.

"Good-by, Belle, and good luck." Dr. Rand turned away and she could only look after him sadly.

Early the next morning a hotel servant ran up. "De Provost want to talk to you."

When she entered the headquarters, the Provost Marshal faced her with an embarrassed air. Awkwardly he looked toward a man she had never seen before, a heavily built officer. "Miss

Boyd, Major Sherman of the 12th Illinois, and Mr. Cridge." As the Major bowed, Belle's eyes moved to the squat civilian who stepped out from the corner of the room. The Provost spoke again: "Miss Boyd, they've come here to arrest you."

For a moment, in spite of past experience, she did not believe the words. "Arrest me—for what?"

The Major sounded genuinely regretful. "This isn't pleasant, but I have to carry out my orders, miss." As he paused, Cridge pulled out a paper, and the words danced before her: "Proceed immediately to Front Royal . . . bring her at once to Washington." The paper carried the signature of "E. M. Stanton, Secretary of War."

9

BELLE MOVED a step toward Major Sherman. When he stared down, she realized that the detective, Mr. Cridge, and not the officer, controlled the situation. An appeal came to her, but a second look at the detective told her it would be hopeless.

"I've got to inspect your quarters." Cridge addressed her in a hard, flat voice.

Belle felt another shock of surprise and panic. What a fool she had been; she might have expected something of the sort, and yet she had done nothing about hiding the dangerous papers in her room. Still, if she acted quickly . . . Trying not to let Cridge see her alarm, she nodded.

"Very well. Everything's in confusion over there, with my packing for Richmond. I hope you'll allow me to straighten up for a minute or two?"

The detective frowned, his eyes devoid of any expression. Turning with a swiftly beating heart, Belle went out through the hotel hall and toward the cottage. This was her only chance. But as she crossed the threshold she heard a heavy thumping. "You think I'm a fool?" Cridge shoved past her, grabbed up a dress from her bed, a mound of shirtwaists, a pair of petticoats.

While Belle looked on in helpless rage the detective pulled each garment inside out, peered at the seams and tossed it on the floor. Frances darted up and shouted impulsively, "Hey, you, you be careful with them clothes! I work' all day yesterday on 'em."

Cridge gave the maid a glare that silenced her. Finishing with the clothes, he walked to Belle's desk. "Well, now, what's this?" The detective reached happily toward her portfolio, which held a dozen of her most valuable papers. His fingers fell short. With a swift gesture the Negro girl seized the portfolio, raced out of the door, and slammed it behind her.

"Drop that, drop it or you'll be sorry till the day—" Finding that he was talking to himself, Cridge started after Frances. It took him several seconds to lumber around Belle and the clothes on the floor, open the door, and stumble along the dark hall. With a cry Belle ran behind him and watched with growing delight as the clumsy man lost more time in descending the stair, throwing open one door, another, and finally a third before he discovered Frances in the kitchen.

By then the maid stood beside the blazing fire, a poker in her hand, the empty portfolio on the floor, its contents consumed. A pair of soldiers appeared from the courtyard, but too late to intervene.

"You black . . ." The detective's raging curses sounded almost sweet in Belle's ears. As she smiled he whirled on her. "And you—you got exactly a half hour to pack for Washington City. One small trunk. You won't be needing much clothes where you're going."

The village was left behind against the haze of the encircling blue mountains. Belle remembered the day of her arrival, her long hours of watching at the hotel, the time she ran to the battle. She was being paid back for it all.

In a fog of misery the girl entered the train, and heard the Major whisper, "We've assigned Lieutenant Steele to go with you." Belle found a neat youth whose kind look reassured her.

Years afterward, Belle would repeat stories of the gentle air and manner of Lieutenant Steele. He brought water; he found a pillow for her head and several times succeeded in getting cups of coffee.

The next six or seven hours she spent in wondering where they would take her in Washington, and what they would do with her.

When the cars jolted, she waked with a start. "We're getting in," the Lieutenant murmured, and all her alarm returned. As she stepped off the train, a husky, impassive stranger addressed Lieutenant Steele. "That's all, soldier; get on with your business." The voice was unexpectedly coarse, and as he introduced himself the speaker almost shouted at her.

"Lafe Baker-chief of detectives. I'll attend to you."

Lafayette Baker . . . she knew that name. For months she had heard of him as one of Stanton's closest agents. She had little time to ponder the matter, for he grabbed her arm and hurried her toward a waiting carriage.

"The Old Capitol," he snapped to the driver, and Belle felt a chill. How often she had been told of that forbidding place, the prison that had held Mrs. Greenhow and scores of other Southern agents or sympathizers. . . . Her eyes closed, and she lowered her head.

When she looked up again she saw the Old Capitol at First and A streets, a tall, faded red hulk of a building. "All right, now." Baker stepped down, and with a sense of foreboding she followed him up the brief flight of stairs. Inside another man of heavy physique approached. Superintendent Wood, if you please. "So this is the celebrated spy—a distinguished guest! We'll try to make you comfortable at our little hotel," he grinned. "This way, miss."

Silently Belle followed Superintendent Wood down a short passage, up a stairway to a dark hall. The warm, fetid air rushed toward her, and she winced. He gestured carelessly. "This sure wasn't built for a prison, and it never had so many folks packed in before." The sheer size of the place surprised her, but wher-

ever she glanced she found evidence of habitation, of prisoners crowded into a decaying frame of crumbling brick, broken walls, and worm-eaten wood.

With the Superintendent, Belle entered a second-floor section. He stopped and pointed to the left. "You're in Number 6." She stared into a grim little room with two barred windows, a scarred iron bed, uncovered wooden table, and slop jar. "It's so hot the door can stay open, as long as you behave yourself," Wood told her, and walked off.

A Negro attendant arrived. "I'm Marie, the onliest girl that works here. . . . No, *ma'am*, no other white ladies in the prison at all."

Two plates appeared with her food—a fair amount of it, yet savorless. After a few minutes she pushed it aside and leaned her head on the table.

The sound of a low cough reached her from somewhere nearby. Instantly she swung around, and a little object rolled over the floor toward her from a shadowed room across the hall. She found it was a paper twisted around a nutshell. The shell had been whittled into a basket painted with Confederate colors. Excitedly, she read the words: "Courage. You are among friends."

#### 10

BEFORE DAWN a clang sounded, signaling that the new day had started. In her cell Belle heard the signal bell and a sick despair swept her. Her mother and father, Grandma and Alice . . . what were they doing now? Her yearning to be with them was like a physical agony.

When she swung open the door a tramp of feet sounded and from the low mumble she understood that the men from nearby cells were being taken to the yard. A lanky form passed, a head turned, and she read friendly curiosity in the bearded counte-

nance. As the line went by, the same thing happened again. A third face appeared, and it was that of someone she knew, John Turner, a young infantryman from Richmond.

She took up Mrs. Glenn's Bible. "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want . . ." The passage meant so much, promised such reassurance; she closed her eyes to ponder it again. A moment later the girl bent forward; had she imagined she heard a light knock? A scraping began, apparently in the wall beside her, and softly Belle pushed the door until it was almost closed again.

Someone was cutting through the old, thin plaster near the floor. Her hand to her face, she waited tensely. If only the guard did not pass for a few minutes . . . There, the tip of a case knife broke through. A paper dropped to the floor, and she snatched it up. "Greetings, good cheer, Miss Boyd. Answer only when we give signal from this side—and take care."

At the sound of a heavy step she dropped her shoes in front of the tiny opening. Several times that day she received messages, and slowly she learned about the situation in the prison.

The place, she discovered, had "everything" in the way of prisoners—captured Confederate soldiers, Southern blockade runners, "political prisoners," Union deserters, Negroes classified as "contraband," Northerners accused of swindling their government, crooked contractors, and, not least, men held without charge. In some cases friends and relatives learned only long afterward of the arrests.

As the day went by, Belle felt an increasing tension. She had been prepared, more or less, to face up to any accusations the other side brought. Now she began to understand something of the Union's purpose; it was to lock her away as it did so many others, and cow her into silence.

Her mood blacker than ever, she went to bed. In the morning, soon after a soggy breakfast, she caught the tap of quick footsteps and darted toward the door. Perhaps her father or some friend had managed to send a message. . . . At the sight of the grinning, nattily attired man in the hall she drew back.

"From the Star, Miss Boyd." Without invitation the newspaperman walked into the room and took the stool near the window.

"I've nothing to say to you."

Her caller went briskly on: "Miss, we've accumulated reports about you from a lot of places. It is true, for instance . . . ?" The correspondent asked one disturbing question after another, about military affairs, her connection with Stonewall Jackson, her friends in Washington. Several times she replied sharply; then realizing again that her temper might make things worse, she stood silent at the window. "Now will you go, please?" she asked at last. Flipping his notebook shut, the visitor walked out with a grin.

A few hours later the Negro girl Marie slipped up and asked in a furtive whisper, "Ma'am, you know the food you get is special?" Belle's face revealed her surprise. "A man call' at the office and pay so you have the bes'." The maid glanced toward the hall. "He han' this to a fellow downstairs, and the fellow ax me to pass it to you." As if afraid of what she had done, Marie scurried out, and Belle read the brief message: Five or six Southern friends were in touch with Union politicians, doing what they could for her.

The heat continued to be almost stifling, and she lay limp, wiping her face and arms for a long time before she could sleep. The next morning began slowly, and Belle approached the window bars. A civilian, walking with a cane, went slowly along the street opposite the prison. He limped, and he seemed to depend on the stick in his hand. There was something familiar about the figure. Halting, the man removed his hat, wiped his brow as if in annoyance at the heat, and she suddenly recognized her father.

For an instant she could not believe it was Ben. How could he be here, in Union territory? Then she realized that he must have left the Southern army. Without any question Mary had sent full word of Belle's arrest; and undoubtedly Ben had called on Washington friends to help him get a pass through the lines.

She fought the impulse to call out, to make him understand she had seen him. It might be dangerous for both of them. Sadly she watched him put on his hat and walk slowly away.

She caught a noise in the wall, and stepped forward as a new note dropped from the slit—her "private postal" system, as she called it in her messages. From the folded paper a clipping fell out, and she found that it was the *Star's* interview. The very first words made her face flush with shock and bewilderment.

Miss Boyd, the newspaperman said, was a "notorious" woman. She had been intimate with a Union general. What fantastic lies these were! The reporter claimed that she had admitted enough spying to send her to the gallows. She read with further astonishment that officials had permitted a number of Washingtonians of Confederate sympathy to call on her; she had been allowed carte blanche at the prison, as a strangely priviliged character. . . .

This was bad, indeed. The claims, false as they were, might be highly damaging. Late that afternoon she received confirmation of her fears. A message came through the wall and her fellow prisoners told her that her father had gone several times to the office downstairs. Each time he had been refused permission to see her or to send word to her.

Furiously she rapped for the sentry. "Tell Superintendent Wood I've got to talk to him." The soldier shrugged and turned away; she never heard whether or not he transmitted her request, but in any case Mr. Wood did not appear.

With morning she decided her next step—a message to Secretary Stanton. She would send a letter to the devil himself, if that seemed feasible. She wrote swiftly and decisively:

Hon. E. M. Stanton. I am given to understand that I was arrested at your instance, and that I am incarcerated here under your orders. The newspapers (whose falsehoods and infamous abuse I think the Government should at least protect me from while a prisoner) amongst other things charge me with being a "Rebel Spy" and "Mail Carrier."

Where do they get their information? I shall esteem it a favor

if you will furnish me with a copy of the charges against me, and also inform me what I, a young lady of nineteen, am to do in the future. What do you wish me to do? You surely do not wish to murder me by keeping me in prison. And then, Mr. Secretary, my dear Pa, my natural protector, is denied access to me. Surely it cannot have been with your sanction. Do you wish to punish a young lady for opinion's sake by denying her the sympathy for a moment of her own Father? I beg you will give me a reply to this, Mr. Secretary . . . Yours respectfully,

Miss Belle Boyd, Virginia.

She signed the last word with a flourish, and called for the sentry. "You tell the Superintendent I've got to see him, and it's about Mr. Stanton." The name of the War Secretary might do the trick, she thought, and it did. After a time Wood appeared, a small smile on his face. The smile widened when he read her note.

"It will go to him, Miss Belle." The Superintendent pursed his lips. "Though I can't promise what will happen after that, or even if anything will happen. You're quite a writer as well as a talker." With a chuckle Wood disappeared, and she stared after him, her mood confused.

As the days passed Belle decided that Stanton would not reply to her, and that she would never know the real charges against her.

Then through her "postal system" came another message: "Your father has had to leave Washington." Though Belle was saddened, she told herself that Ben, after all, would be safer out of the city. Nevertheless she had a sensation of ever-growing loneliness. Nearly three weeks had passed since her arrival, and the days and nights loomed endlessly ahead.

Soon after dark one evening that same week two guards appeared in the hallway, a stretcher between them, with a tall form on it. They placed the sick man on a cot in the room diagonally across from Belle's, beside four or five other prison-

ers. By straining she could get a glimpse of the cell; the gaslight went on and she made out a rangy man, the outlines of a pale, thin face. One of the other prisoners propped the dark head higher, and Belle's breath stopped for a moment.

It was her friend Lieutenant Cliff McVay. She had last heard from him on the Richmond front, months ago; then there had been no more letters. Now his eyes were dulled, expressionless, and the arm over the edge of the cot hung limply, without strength. When had she last seen Cliff? She thought of that day at Manassas, the day of her arrival and his departure. For the first time in months she remembered what he said then: They would meet again; he promised it. How strangely he had made good his pledge!

The dark head lifted, and Belle saw the patient turn nervously to the man at his side, to ask something. He received his answer, and now, as Cliff's gaze turned to meet hers, his hand lifted in a sign of recognition. She motioned, and put her fingers to her lips.

The next day and for days after that she and Cliff studied each other across the hall. Belle sent messages to the next room, to be transferred across the hall. After a time he managed a weak, penciled note: "So I did keep my promise to you!" Another followed: "Better today, thanks to you. When will we dance again?"

Belle stared pensively at the second message, and after a moment she wrote her reply: "The first one is yours, whenever you claim it."

August had nearly ended, and the heat increased, until the air felt as if it came from the mouth of a stove. In spite of everything Cliff's condition improved, so that he could sit up daily for several hours.

Early one afternoon their eyes met, and Belle read an appeal that stirred her; had she suspected it before? She supposed she had, without admitting the fact to herself.

Would this have happened if they had not found each other again as they did, in the misery and imprisonment they shared?

She did not know; she understood only that Cliff had become very dear to her . . . A little later her friends next door passed one of Cliff's notes through the opening.

Belle read it with happy excitement. "Tomorrow I can attend the church services in the yard. Please come, my darling."

#### 11

LATE THAT SATURDAY evening Belle sat in the darkness near her window, fanning herself, wiping at her damp cheeks and neck and forehead. Even during her summer in the Old Capitol she had never suffered through a night like this one.

Dragging herself to the creaking cot, she turned restlessly for a long time before dropping into a light sleep. Before seven o'clock she woke slowly, and when she started to get up she sank limply back. The room seemed to swing around her, and her head throbbed with a steady pain. Twice she tried to rise, and dropped to the bed again.

By steadying herself with her hand against the grimy wall she could force herself up. With a dizzying effort she reached out for the washstand, and rubbed a wet rag over her face.

She heard a familar voice in the hall, the slurred one of Superintendent Wood: "All that want to hear God's word according to Jeff Davis go down to the yard. All that want it according to Abe Lincoln, go to No. 16!"

Belle took a last glance in the mirror. She rubbed at her pale cheeks, moistened her lips, and several times fingered her light hair. She looked far from her best; nevertheless she would be there. Opening her door, she saw that Cliff's cell had already emptied. In the yard with its dusty earth beaten grassless by the long tramping of the prisoners, most of the men had gathered, and the minister stood on a box at the end.

When the Confederates turned toward her, Belle acknowledged the silent bows, the smiles, but her eyes hunted every-

where for Cliff. Had there been some mistake; where was he? She heard a movement and saw him approach, his hands unsteady as he walked with a cane, his eyes full of love and gratitude.

With an effort he went to the back of the crowd, and leaned against the fence. For a moment Belle hesitated, wondering if the guards would allow her to follow. Two fellow prisoners stepped aside to open a way; others did the same thing. With that she realized that they understood the situation and were doing what they could to permit her to be near Cliff. Gratefully she found a place near the wall a few feet from him. The guard frowned, and was about to move toward her in irritation, when the minister lifted his hands. "Today's text . . ."

Although she tried to pay attention, Belle became steadily more aware of Cliff McVay's scrutiny. Their eyes met, and they did not look away. In his look she read his concern for her, a yearning that she could not mistake. "Belle," he whispered.

"My dear, when they brought me here . . . for a while I never thought I'd get out of my cell alive. Now, just to be beside you like this . . ." His eyes darted to the guard, who was squinting suspiciously at them.

Belle asked herself when they would have to go in. Sometimes the attendants allowed the prisoners a little additional time on Sundays, and again none at all. The whole group waited in silence, until the senior guard called out, "All right, you got ten minutes more. Now start walking!" As the prisoners milled about, Clifford stayed with his back to the wall, and Belle also remained stationary. Around them rose a murmur, which the attendants ignored for the moment. Now was their chance.

"Belle, please. Try to look away so they won't notice we're talking," Cliff urged. "I have to speak quickly. It took us a long time to find out how we feel. Let's not be foolish this time. . . . What I mean is, I'm in love with you. Do you—care at all?"

With her eyes still turned away from him, she spoke swiftly and directly. "Of course I care. You ought to know that by now!"

Unexpectedly one of the Confederates who walked slowly around the yard halted with his back to them; another followed suit, and a third and fourth. These men were shielding them, for a few minutes at least. As he sensed what had happened, Clifford's hand went out, caught Belle's. He stepped closer, and his lips were almost on hers.

"Hey, break that up over there!"

The guard had discovered the cluster of Confederates in the corner; but the group of prisoners did not move away from Belle and Cliff. His arms tightened around her, and she clung to him. He kissed her gently, then more fiercely. As he still held her a heavy hand shoved at Cliff's shoulder, and the attendant shouted, "You gonna catch hell for this, all of you! On your way now, every last one."

Badly shaken, Belle told the guard: "I'd like to go back to my cell."

At the entrance of the building, though still trembling, she turned to smile at Cliff. Let them try to stop that! New happiness and courage strengthened her. In spite of the morning's strain Belle's mind lingered on the few minutes she had had with Cliff. She went over and over the things he had said, the way he held her. This time it did not matter a great deal, even to be locked in the stifling room, for she knew that the man she loved was only a few feet away, and in time they would be together again, here or elsewhere.

Belle heard a scraping sound on the wall, and bent down to catch a note as it fell. "Can I tell the others we will be married when we're out of this hole?" Her heart sang, as she scratched a single word below the question, and added her name.

That afternoon Belle dozed at the window. Hours later noises from outside waked her, and she started up in confusion.

There was an unusual flurry of movement in the street, a crowd of civilians and a band of Union soldiers, on their way to an assignment. Often such marchers shouted up at the Southern prisoners; this time one caught a glimpse of her and shook his fist.

"Stick your face in, you bitch!"
"Look out, you God-damned . . ."

As the bitter calls broke from a dozen throats, Belle withdrew, her anger flaring. But why should she pull away because the sight of her offended them? Let them be offended. She stepped again to the window, and the abuse increased, the words more furious and filthier. Still she stayed there, white-faced, and all at once she cried out, "How long did it take you to get back from Manassas? Are you on your way to Richmond yet?"

The man just below waved his rifle. "Shut up, or I'll shoot you!"

The raging soldier actually lifted his rifle to sight her. He meant what he said and, her heart pounding, Belle ran back toward the door. Already she regretted her outburst; as she expected, the sentry hurried in, sized up the situation, and gave her a harsh look. "This door's going to stay closed for a long time. Till you start behaving again."

Gloomily she sank to the bedside, and watched with dulled eyes as a note dropped again through the wall. Cliff had been shut away as she was, in punishment for the incident in the yard. Belle's face clouded. He had only begun to get better; could he stand this wretched heat? And yet if she complained, she might only make things worse.

Stories were spreading from corridor to corridor, stories of something big that was taking place in the war, at a point near Washington. From the distant streets came faint tramping sounds; thousands of Union men were leaving the city.

The next day a familiar word traveled from cell to cell—Manassas, where a second battle was about to be fought. With it went a name that stirred Belle deeply, the magic name of Stonewall Jackson. She asked the next cell for more information, but received only a vague reply. No one knew much; the issues were being settled on the field.

Overnight a new development, or a rumor of it. Commissioners were supposedly meeting to arrange an exchange of

certain prisoners! No one could find out who might be included, or when the event would take place.

Daily she inquired about Cliff, to learn only that he was much the same, though he felt the heat badly, as she did. After several vain efforts she persuaded one of the guards to take a message to the Superintendent, and eventually Wood stood grinning outside her door.

"Well, Miss Belle. Congratulations on your engagement."

Now how had he discovered that? When her face showed her surprise, Wood lifted an eyebrow. "We got ways here." Rubbing his bearded cheek, he entered, sat down, and murmured, "Your door'll be opened again, and his, too. And what else can I do for our happy guests?" He spoke as always in heavy-handed irony, and for a moment Belle hesitated over an answer.

Then she said pertly, "Why, you can help me get a trousseau." She saw no reason why she should not accept his offer, however he had meant it. "Supplies are getting right scarce in the South, and the papers boast that your stores are filled with fine things," she told him.

With a quizzical look the Superintendent got to his feet and lumbered out. "We'll see about that; we'll see," he guffawed.

A dull, distant roar echoed over the prison. There could be no mistake about the sound—the pounding of artillery from somewhere over in Virginia. Could they be fighting now at Manassas?

Suddenly, Superintendent Wood ambled past the row of cells. "All you rebels on this floor get ready." His tone was laconic, his words amazing. "Because you're heading for Dixie tomorrow, and Miss Belle's going with you."

Catching her excited eye, the Superintendent stopped and lowered his voice. "Well, Miss Belle, there's a little more news for you. The War Department says you can't get your trousseau in the city. They didn't say, though, that you couldn't leave a little money here so that your honorable Superintendent could buy it and send it after you!"

At her gasp of pleasure he grinned. "Write your list for me, and when you get to Virginia, I'll send it by truce boat!"

Belle took his arm. "Mr. Wood, I can't tell you how grateful I am. But"—her eyes went to the room across the hall—"but he'll be well enough to go with us?"

The Superintendent rubbed his chin. "The doctor ain't sure yet. If he has to stay a while, though, we'll push him on after you the minute his feed is up again."

Belle gazed after the disappearing figure. Perhaps she should stay here until Cliff was ready. . . . Yet that, she suspected, would be impossible. In this place you did what the officials wished, or you regretted it. She did not lose a moment in starting a note to Cliff across the hall, and his reply came back: "Good cheer, Belle. Together soon in Virginia. We'll have that first dance, and then we'll call on the minister!"

In the sunlit front yard nearly two hundred prisoners waited and Union men formed a tight line halfway across the street to hold back the crowd.

A Confederate major took her arm. "There's a carriage for you, and I'm to ride with you."

She saw little more of the crowded Washington scene, the guards on the street corners, the anxious faces of people who awaited further word from the war fronts. They couldn't get out of this place too quickly to suit her. . . . The Major turned with an oddly appraising look. "Miss Belle, I suppose you know why you've missed hanging, or at least a long sentence?"

"Why?"

"For one reason only. Because you're a woman."

"Really?" Belle was puzzled.

"No woman's been hanged yet in this war." The Confederate's face was sober. "But that doesn't mean one won't be, someday. If you ever get in their hands when they're furious over a bad situation, and people are crying for blood . . . Take my advice, and don't press your luck."

# Part Three

## WANDERINGS

"I consoled myself that 'all was fair in love and war.'"

-BELLE BOYD

12

LATER, looking back at the next nine or ten months of her life, Belle recognized it as the most unsettled period of all those turbulent years. For nearly a month she waited in Richmond, trying vainly to get information about Cliff or messages from him. At the boardinghouse of a Mrs. Wright, she established quarters from which she made a long series of fruitless calls at Confederate offices. Meanwhile she wrote endless notes to the Old Capitol, to her fiancé, or to Superintendent Wood. She never knew if Cliff received one of them.

Eventually a heavy box arrived with the Superintendent's name and, running to her room, Belle tore open the wrappings. Surely it would have a message about Cliff. Lifting the cover, she drew out a rich green riding costume, a superbly trimmed woolen dress, a soft white satin gown with a foam of veil.

The Superintendent had kept his promise, but her eyes filled. A trousseau and no bridegroom.

At first she liked much of Richmond, its feeling of decisions in the wind. Several times, however, people made it clear they considered her, if not precisely a country girl, and gauche, at least "conspicuous." Then Ben Boyd sent word that he was

coming to Richmond. Southern forces had taken Martinsburg again, and Mary was anxious to see her daughter.

As Ben knocked at her door, emotion choked her. She had not seen him since the day she spotted him from her barred window in Washington. He still used a cane to walk. His clothes hung loosely; his skin was almost blue-white, and the short flight of stairs had made him puff.

That evening they headed for home. . . . On their way they received word of the newest blow to the Confederacy. Robert E. Lee had taken a daring step, taking the war into Maryland. If he and his men won, victory might be within their grasp; for days Belle had gone daily to the papers to hear the latest word.

But at the station a friend called Ben. "The battle's over at Sharpsburg. We didn't win as we expected and—and we're pulling back out of Maryland."

The word clouded their trip. Their train was nearing Martinsburg when one of Ben's acquaintances entered with a newspaper. "Emancipation," Belle read over her father's shoulder. In Washington Abraham Lincoln had announced that on January 1 of 1863 slaves would be declared free in all sections of the Confederacy still undefeated. Acting quickly after the Southern withdrawal at Sharpsburg, the Union President had struck hard in another way. The war would now be a kind of crusade—slavery against freedom. Grimly she studied the words. . . .

As she and her father went up the road toward home, however, Belle felt a surge of returning happiness. The small figure of Frances waited in the doorway, and her eager young brothers and sister, taller than she remembered them. Mary Boyd came out, eyes wet, and Belle ran to her, dropping her head against Mary's shoulder.

Inside the house, they talked of the war until Mary remarked casually, "General Jackson's just arrived at his camp a few miles up the road."

"He has?" Belle straightened up with interest. This was the sort of thing she had been hoping to hear, and she knew exactly what she would do about it. Intuitively Mary moved toward her

daughter. "Belle, after what's happened, you've got to put all that behind you. You've been well warned, you've sufered . . ."

Belle stared at her hands and answered softly, "All I want to do is see the General and thank him for the letter he sent me. I haven't had a chance to meet him since then, Ma." When Mary hesitated, she realized that she had lost the skirmish. "Very well, but I'll insist your father goes with you."

Of all the people in the world Belle supposed she stood most in awe of Stonewall Jackson. She and Ben stopped their carriage at the camp entrance the next morning and soon they waited with a sentry before his tent. A hand appeared at the tent flap, and out came the man who looked so much the bearded prophet. The hazel eyes focused on Ben and Belle, and softened.

"Miss Belle, you got away from the Yankees again, didn't you?" Stonewall said admiringly.

She had searched for a way to bring up the question that lay foremost in her mind. Now, however, she blurted out directly. "Sir, will I be able to work for you, as I did before?"

Jackson studied Belle's face. Then he spoke slowly: "Miss, conditions are changing; things are more difficult than they've been. If the Yankees get back here, and they well may, it might be dangerous for you even to be near them."

Her dismay showed and the General added, "Anyway, Miss Belle, we'll see how things work out. But if we do draw away from here, I'll send you notice in good time." Suddenly Stonewall reached forward to Belle, touched her head with both of his gnarled hands, and whispered, "God bless you, my child."

For the rest of the day she saw before her Jackson's bearded face as he invoked a blessing on her.

"Belle?" Absorbed in thought, she had missed her father's approach. Glancing up, she saw that he seemed disturbed. "They claim the Union's coming back, and very soon."

When Belle went for a ride the next day nearly every Union sympathizer along the way regarded her with an open hostility that indicated how close the change must be. Much disturbed, she cut short her trip and hurried home. Three or four horses were tied up before her house and in the parlor her flustered mother was hovering over Stonewall himself.

The General got to his feet with evident relief. "Miss Belle, I'm here to say that you ought to be ready to leave before long. You know, if they only find you here now, that will be enough for them to arrest you."

His face grew more earnest than ever. "In Richmond or any other place well inside our lines, you'll be safe. But not here, where everybody knows you, my child." Exile from home—it was not a pleasant prospect. . . .

Belle waited for further word, but Stonewall was no man for idle conversation. She understood how useless it would be to ask for more information about the military situation. Even his own men did not know where they headed when he started them off.

The General's arrival had caused a great flurry in the neighborhood, and several dozen Martinsburg residents waited before the door to call to him. . . . Years later Belle would recall the sight of him, bent slightly forward on his horse, eyes on a distant point, as he rode away in a haze of dust.

For her safety Stonewall was sending an ambulance in which she would go to Winchester. Dismally Belle spent the next hour in packing with Frances' help. Packing, unpacking . . . these days that seemed to be her life. Each time her gaze fell on the remainder of her trousseau her heart hurt. Her mother stood in the doorway of her room, and when Belle went to her, Mary had such a strangely constrained manner that the girl asked anxiously,

"Ma, what is it?"

Mary cleared her throat. "I've been trying to bring this up for several days, child. Oh no, I don't have bad news—I hope not, that is. You see"—Mary swallowed—"I'm going to have a baby."

Belle's eyes met her mother's. Mary was only thirty-eight, but there had been no new child in about ten years.

Her mother spoke almost as if in apology, and Belle mastered

her astonishment. "Ma, that's just fine. It's only that I'm-surprised."

The ambulance arrived, and Belle said her farewells in an atmosphere that was almost frenzied. Time was very short, and the army vehicle swept quickly around the bend in the road. On her way Belle looked moodily ahead. Now what? The young driver, she realized, regarded her with eager curiosity. After a half-dozen questions about her work at Front Royal he asked, "Miss Belle, I suppose you'll be running the land blockade?"

"What do you mean?"

"Well." He appeared abashed. "Meaning no offense, miss, I couldn't help but notice that finery." He jerked his sandy head toward the boxes that held her wedding costumes. "Everybody knows things like that has to be got from Yankee territory. And there's other stuff that comes in the same way—things we need in the Army, like medicines and supplies. It's real good work, all right."

Belle mulled over the idea. Why not try it for the time being, at least? That night when she sat at the table after supper with her old Winchester friend; the doorbell rang and the maid brought in the young ambulance driver.

"Miss!" The boy had a dancing light in his eyes. "The General told me to bring a letter to you, and this, too." Handing her a heavy box, he waited while she opened the note. When she read the first words, Belle's mouth worked. It was a commission making her Captain and honorary aide-de-camp to Stonewall Jackson. By its terms she was to receive the attention and respect paid to any officer in the Confederate Army.

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AND STILL there came no further word from Cliff or from the Old Capitol. For months Belle carried out a series of missions, taking medical supplies and messages, watching always for

chances to further her war activities. Whenever she left a town, she arranged for mail to be forwarded; a message from him must not be delayed.

Now and then Belle wrote to General Jackson with news or observations of military or civilian life, and she passed on similar information to Richmond officials. At times she despaired of meeting Cliff again; then her normal optimism assured her that matters would work out.

From her cousins in Knoxville there arrived an invitation to spend some time with them. It was a part of the South that Belle did not know well, and the prospect intrigued her.

With the family of Judge Samuel Boyd and other Boyds she stayed nearly four months, until spring of 1863. Afterward she made other trips in Tennessee and Alabama, staying generally at plantations or town homes, and of necessity hoarding her funds. Late in April she had an invitation to Mobile on the Gulf. She would be still farther removed from home and Cliff. But what could she do to be with them? Restless and bored, she went to Montgomery and on to the Gulf town, where she rode horseback along the sandy beaches and visited friends in the outskirts.

Back in Mobile after two weeks in the suburbs, Belle stayed briefly at the Battle House. Returning one evening, she received a letter. Glancing lightly at it, she halted. It had Cliff's handwriting. With a sense of shock she saw that the postmark was his own little town, inside the Federal lines. So he had been allowed to leave prison, and she had not even known that! Her fingers quivering, she tried to calm herself as she read:

Dear Belle. After so long, I have trouble in starting this letter. I have spent nearly all of these past months in bed and even now am not yet recovered. This week I am allowed up only a few hours each day. I think you may have heard how badly our family property suffered. Now I must try to support my brothers and sisters as best I can.

After a great deal of thought, considering my own condition and the state of affairs, I agreed to take the oath of allegiance to



the Union. In my situation, could I be of any further use to the South?

It seems so long, so very long, since we talked of an engagement. For you as for me, everything must be different now. I am told that you are getting the recognition your work deserves, and that you are happy in the things you are doing. After the war I hope we may meet sometime again. But it would be unfair to hold you to a promise made under that former situation, and I have no doubt that you would wish to be released. I do this freely . . .

Almost numbed, Belle sat on the edge of the bed, her eyes fixed on the page. Cliff believed it "unfair" to hold her to her promise; he had no doubt she wanted her release. But that wasn't so, it wasn't so at all. Couldn't he have asked just what she thought before he made this decision?

She struggled to keep back the tears; they came nevertheless. Her face pressed into her pillow, she reminded herself that this was the second time she had loved a man, and had everything go wrong. . . . For most of the night she lay sleepless.

The next morning Belle struggled against the impulse to stay in bed. When the maid brought warm water, she washed mechanically, drew on her clothes, and went downstairs. In the dining hall she saw the surprise of an elderly friend who sat across from her. "You look so peaked today, Miss Boyd. I've never noticed before . . ."

As she tried to swallow the sticky gruel and pale coffee, Belle almost gagged. A few minutes later she came to attention when she heard someone say, "...General Jackson's wounds. Though the paper says they're trifling." "What wounds?" Belle asked incredulously.

The speaker handed her the paper. It told only that Stonewall had been shot at Chancellorsville, and it added assurance that the injuries were minor.

"Thank God they're not worse." Belle drank the rest of the bitter coffee and returned upstairs. Finding that the maid had finished doing her room, she went to the desk, took out paper, and hunted for unanswered correspondence. For an hour she worked steadily, but her mind wandered again and again to Cliff

and to Stonewall Jackson. A knock sounded, and she took an envelope from the porter's hand. Normally the sight of a telegraph wire would have made her nervous; she opened this one with an absent look.

Miss Belle Boyd: General Jackson now lies in state at the Governor's mansion. Bassett French, A.D.C. to the Governor.

She sat upright, and the letters scattered to the floor. Only a few words, so clipped, and so shattering.

Later in the day someone remarked, "At least Stonewall had a full glory—no dawn and no dusk. One great flash, and it was over." Belle nodded. For people like her and like Cliff life went dismally on, but a great, vital man died after an hour or two.

Her original astonishment and anger at Cliff had eased and in their place she suffered a steady hurt. She wanted desperately to be at home again, or at least in Virginia. She would go to Richmond, to see if she could possibly continue on to Martinsburg.

Riding in the slow train, she eventually reached the Confederate capital, to find the place badly overcrowded, its memories unnerving.

A secret letter carrier brought a note through the Federal lines from her mother. Mary was happy to learn that Belle had ended her wandering. For Mary herself the early summer had proved difficult; the baby would be born in six weeks, and the doctor visited her daily.

That same day she became aware that the war had approached a new crisis, or rather a double one. Down on the Mississippi the vital city of Vicksburg, "Gibraltar of the Confederacy," had maintained itself doggedly against Union pressure. For weeks Belle read stories of the way some of the half-starved natives ate cats and rats and hid in caves under the blasting attack of General U. S. Grant. Ominous rumors reached Richmond: Vicksburg was growing weaker every day. At the same time, however, a favorable report spread. Lee had seized the initiative again, and was advancing into Pennsylvania.

Later that week she learned that the recapture of Winchester, near Martinsburg, was expected in a matter of days; the valley was falling again into Confederate hands. Before dusk Belle had headed out of Richmond for the Confederate point nearest her home.

By the time the attack began on Winchester, she had taken quarters at a farmhouse only four miles away. Several officers' wives were there too, and they sat together in the parlor. With the first blast of artillery the older members of the group flinched. Belle's strongest feeling, she told herself, was of annoyance. The issue was being decided almost at their elbows, and they could see nothing of it. A young officer who boarded at the farm while he recovered from a serious wound came to the parlor doorway, and spoke thoughtfully: "The first time I've heard that sound and haven't been in the middle of it." His bandaged shoulder drooped.

At the sight of him Belle voiced her rebellion against the atmosphere around her. "Wouldn't you like to watch, instead of staying in here like somebody at a wake?"

As the officer stared in surprise, she went on: "There's a big hill nearby, you know." One of the women interrupted. "Miss Boyd, you couldn't do that," she exclaimed in a voice of congealed horror.

That settled the matter. Eyes flashing, Belle started for the door. "I'm going to, whether the Captain thinks he can join me or not."

"The Captain's joining you. Now, if you'll help me get this coat on . . ." In a few minutes they sat their horses together on a clear elevation, and the girl produced a well-used pair of field glasses. She caught the Captain's look. "Yes, they're pretty ancient—nothing special about them, except that they once belonged to Stonewall." In Richmond one of his officers had presented them to her and frequently she took them with her.

Silent, engrossed in the struggle, they watched the toylike figures, the puffs of smoke, men leaping into ravines, emerging from thickets. Suddenly a blast made Belle's eardrums throb; a round cloud of brown smoke rose in the air, and the Captain snatched at her arm. "They're turning the guns on us!"

At that moment a shell arched toward their party, with a sound that had the quality of a human shriek. Seizing Belle's reins, the Captain pulled her horse beside his down the slope, and the rest of the band catapulted after them to safety. Belle had been frightened, and at the same time thrilled. She would not admit it, but she had enjoyed this afternoon more than anything in months, in fact, since the hour that Cliff's letter arrived.

Later a Confederate courier galloped up to the farmhouse, to announce that the area lay in Southern hands again. "Could I borrow a carriage?" Belle asked. "I'm going home—yes, today." Within a few hours the vehicle rocked up to the house in Martinsburg. Opening the door with suspicious caution, Frances shouted her astonishment. "The Yankees still beatin' the road out of here, and now you back!" Crying, the maid took the girl upstairs to her mother.

Mary Boyd, her figure heavily swollen, tried vainly to rise. "Child, you've been away so long, so very long. . . ." The sight of Mary, pale and hollow-eyed with fatigue, disturbed Belle more than she let herself show. "The doctor thinks I've wanted to do too much, with all the excitement and the June heat. But you'll be a tonic for me," Mary said, smiling a little.

Belle's sister and brothers ran in, and after she had caught them to her she led them aside. "You mustn't worry Ma now, please." Ben Boyd entered and she kissed him warmly, exchanged reassurances, and followed him into the hall. "What does the doctor really tell you about her?" Belle asked. What she heard made the girl's face grow longer.

Wretchedly Belle tried not to dwell on the dark possibilities. She stayed at her mother's side, hour after hour. The war echoed only faintly in the quiet house, until Belle grew aware of a half-suppressed excitement in Ben Boyd's manner. "What is it?" she demanded.

"Girl, Lee's really taking the war to the North. He's well into

Pennsylvania with his invasion. They're fighting at some little place, Gettysburg, I think."

Belle closed her eyes to the bulletins that gave details of bloody slaughter, of countless soldiers falling wounded into the ditches on the steaming July days. Both sides lost heavily; more and more men were being fed into the machines of war. For two days there was only silence in the town, and then Ben brought home a paper. Before Belle reached for it, his face told what had happened.

The bloody results of Gettysburg had thrown a shadow over them all. The shadow darkened with the next blow; the vital bastion of Vicksburg had also fallen, and the whole length of the Mississippi lay open. . . . Vicksburg's surrender had come on the Fourth of July, and the Union had thrilled to the event. July 4—it was a date that made Belle's eyes blaze. On that day two years ago the Federal troops had broken into this house and she had . . .

She could not finish the thought; suddenly she had to get outside for a few minutes. In the shade of a great oak she stood still, letting the light breeze cool her. A new, low rumble, she discovered, was a file of Confederate wagons moving out of Martinsburg. When the first vehicle was passing she called, "Where are you going?"

"Out of here, miss, all of us. The faster the better, too." So poor Martinsburg would have to adjust itself once again to a change of hands. While she watched, her thoughts in a whirl, she felt a soft hand at her elbow. It was Frances, alarm in her dark face.

"Miss Belle, come fas'. Your ma about to start!"

They darted among the wagons, and reached Mrs. Boyd just as the doctor arrived. Mary clutched Belle, and for more than an hour the older woman seldom relaxed her frightened grip. Her cries were agonizing. Finally the doctor straightened up and handed a struggling form to Frances. "A girl."

The next few days were the worst of all. Though the baby proved healthy and strong-lunged, Mary Boyd lay exhausted.

On the third day Frances slipped in, whispering, "Yankees comin' toward the town! Everybody sayin' it in the street."

That same afternoon Union officers knocked at the door. As Belle and her father faced them, the spokesman said, "General Kelly asked us to find out if you were really here, Miss Boyd. We'd heard the story and didn't believe it."

When she started to answer sharply, Ben intervened. His wife was still very ill, he explained; to take Belle away at this time might kill Mary Boyd. There followed a long conversation in which the Unionists told them that whatever they felt about it personally, an order for Miss Boyd's arrest had arrived from Washington City. Nevertheless they might delay for a time. . . .

Her father took advantage of the delay and sent urgent appeals to influential Washington friends. During the days that followed Belle continued anxiously under close surveillance in her home. Gradually Mary Boyd's health improved, and she could sit up for a few hours at a time. So that worry, at least, was diminishing.

On a morning in mid-August the Provost Marshal himself arrived with a detective. "Mr. Stanton has sent instructions, and you'll have to go with us," he declared. Belle's palms were clammy; she had an impulse to run, to dash out one of the back doors and hide somewhere. Instead, nodding silently, she went upstairs; in a chocked voice she summoned Frances.

# 14

AT THE SIGHT of the red walls of the Old Capitol the memory of her previous stay there rose inside Belle like the taste of bile in her mouth.

Her father sat opposite her in the carriage, holding her hand

in both of his. Over the detective's protests Ben had accompanied Belle on the long trip, and now he murmured, "Girl, I'll be doing everything I can to get you out, and our friends will be working up here, too. You'll see me before long." Though she nodded, Belle had little hope. In these days of steady Union triumph Secretary Stanton had grown firmer than ever in his handling of Southern prisoners.

"Pa, where are we going?" Belle exclaimed as the vehicle went by the Old Capitol and entered another street. A moment later she recognized the adjoining building—old Duff Green's Row, renamed Carroll Prison.

"All right, don't waste time." The detective reached for her arm when they stopped, and her father intervened to help her down. Belle discovered a familiar figure, that of Superintendent Wood, at the door. "Ah, Miss Belle, our honored guest again. Things are even tighter this time, Miss Belle. Can't find room for what we got, and every day they throw more at us."

The detective motioned to Mr. Boyd to leave, and her father reached out to her, in tears. "Pa, I'll get through this," she reassured him. "But please take care of yourself, won't you?" From his pocket Ben drew several rolled bills, totaling nearly two hundred dollars. Patting her shoulder, he turned away without a word.

Within her own cubicle Belle gazed sadly at the hard bed, the chair and weatherworn dresser. The window bars were thicker, heavier than at the other prison, and she could make out only a small edge of the park across the street. The silence was broken only by the thud of sentries down the hall.

Gradually Belle's interest in the outside world lessened, and apathy crept over her. One evening, sitting wearily at her window, she started to sing to herself. Her voice rose more strongly than she realized, and she noticed a cluster of listeners in the dusk at the edge of the park. When she stopped the group broke up and she sighed after the departing figures.

With a tired hand Belle lowered the gas jet and returned to the window, leaning her head against the frame. All at once a small object whistled past her cheek, hit the wall, and dropped. She was terrified; it had sounded like a bullet. In the silence that followed she peered across the cell, but she could not make out what the long gray object was. She reached over to touch it; yes, it really was a long arrow with a paper attached. Raising the gaslight again, she read:

... You have many very warm friends ... If you will listen attentively to the instructions ... you will be able to correspond with ... your friends outside—On Thursdays and Saturdays, in the evening, just after twilight, I will come into the square opposite the prison. When you hear some one whistling "'Twas within a mile of Edinbro' town," if alone and all is safe, lower the gas as a signal and leave the window. I will then shoot an arrow into your room ... Do not be alarmed, as I am a good shot.

The manner in which you will reply . . . Procure a large india-rubber ball; open it, and place your communication within . . . then sew it together. On Tuesdays I shall come, and you will know of my presence by the same signal. Then throw the ball, with as much force as you can exert, across the street into the square . . . I am really your friend. C.H.

Hurrying to the window, Belle could see no one. Her pulse raced as she reread the remarkable letter.

Taking five of the dollars she had brought with her, she summoned the guard. "I've got to do something to occupy myself and exercise. Can you go to a store for me and buy me several rubber balls?" Whatever he thought of her story, the soldier liked the look of her money, and soon she had several cheap balls. She dutifully bounced them on the floor and against the wall for long "exercise periods" every day. On Tuesday Belle heard a soft whistle at dusk and spied a dim figure in the park. With a nervous effort she threw the ball she had prepared, saw the man bend down, and then "C.H." walked rapidly away. Two nights later the promised arrow whirred in through the bars.

The first words of the message sent a thrill through her. Dr. Mahan and five others, their names unfamiliar to her, were working to free her. Some kind of investigation would probably take place, though C.H. could learn no details. . . .

From then on C.H. appeared several times each week. He gave no hint about himself, and she did not inquire; their notes might be intercepted at any time, and he must protect his identity.

The mid-September heat grew intense: Belle lay on her bed, head throbbing, pulse racing. She discovered a rash on her skin, and suddenly the room seemed to sway; she woke to find the prison surgeon frowning over her. "It's what I expected—typhoid. Nineteen cases here so far."

Again the girl lost consciousness, awakening in the middle of the night, when she thumped weakly for the guard. As he stared at her she murmured, "Ask if Dr. Blair can't come to me." The name had been given to her weeks ago; Dr. Blair, one of the Confederate prisoners, had a good medical record. After another spell of unconsciousness she opened her eyes on a gray-haired man who was pressing cool cloths against her face. "Just rest," he told her, and his face had a kindly concern.

In a series of dreams she saw herself in Martinsburg, with Mary and Ben quietly before a fire. Grandmother Glenn entered, with her cousin Alice and a man in uniform whose face she could not make out. The scene changed, and she was being taken from the family as scores of people jeered at her. In her nightmare she realized that the crowd of revilers were Confederates.

The shock woke her, and back came all the bleakness of the present; she sobbed weakly. "Miss, jus' don' think o' things, don' think. . . ." The brown hand touched her comfortingly. "I'm Mamie, and I'm watchin' over you."

"Miss Boyd, you had us worried for a time." The new voice was that of Dr. Blair, who smiled down at her. "At last you're on the convalescent list." Belle discovered that nearly two weeks had passed, and she knew that she could not have survived without the doctor's skill and the attention of the girl Mamie.

October gave way to November. Belle had been imprisoned nearly three months, and there were no signs of a release. She

alternated between optimism and spells of deep despair. Had she been deserted entirely?

Then late one evening, holding out a spoon of medicine, Dr. Blair murmured reassuringly, "Miss Belle, your father's in Washington again, and we've managed to get word to him about your condition. He's been talking to a lot of people, telling them everything that's happened here."

As Belle half rose, her eyes widening, the doctor cautioned her. "Mind you, it's not settled yet. But we don't think you'll go to any other prison. If things work out right you'll be sent across the lines to Richmond, and your father will be with you." The doctor smiled. "Now, if you cry you'll be worse again." When she questioned him about the underlying reason for her release, he shook his head. "None of us here can be sure. But you see, they've never known quite what to do with you and others like you. You're trouble when you're out; and when you're in here, people get worked up about your case—including some Unionists, too. Their best prospect, I suppose, is to keep you here long enough to beat down your will, then hope you'll—well, behave."

Tired as she was, Belle chuckled with her friend over that last word.

A week later, when she got up, Superintendent Wood came in with official notice. "A few more days, Miss Belle, and then we'll be missing you around here." After a moment his smile faded. "But if you ever fall into Federal hands again, you'll get a lot more than these three months and a half. I hope you know that?"

"Yes, sir," Belle told him meekly. She wanted Wood out of her cell, and for a special reason. The previous day her nurse Mamie had slipped her a note which said that friends outside had found the guard over her relaxed slightly, in view of her approaching departure. They had used funds in the right places, and that day someone would hand her a package. It contained cash which she was to turn over as promptly as possible to designated people in Richmond.

Belle waited anxiously for this delivery, and she sighed with relief as the Superintendent ambled off. When a throat cleared just outside the door, she jumped in surprise.

"Miss Boyd?" Although the man seemed serene, she saw the beads of sweat on his forehead. "The office asked me to bring this special food." She went to the doorway, and as she took the covered plate she felt the dish tremble in his hands, then in hers. The new guard left so quickly that she had no time to say a word.

Under the cover of the dish lay a thick package. Belle counted its contents—twenty thousand dollars in Confederate bills, five thousand in Union money, a purse full of gold. Working swiftly, she put the money into smaller envelopes and hid them in her clothing.

Later that day the same guard arrived, as calm-faced as ever, with a box in which Belle found gauntlets and other army supplies which certain prison friends wanted her to pass on, as well as letters introducing her to several high Confederates. She packed these things in her trunk and eventually Superintendent Wood came to tell her she could leave. "Miss Belle, you're all right," he chuckled. "You never fooled us, but you sure tried."

She beamed back. "I certainly didn't get away with anything, sir."

Wood accompanied her through the hall, pretending not to notice the calls along the way: "Good-by, miss" . . . "God bless you." Belle nodded as she passed. When she reached the street entrance, she looked around for her father, and the Superintendent told her: "They sent word he's sick in Washington City, and you'll hear from him later."

"But I've got to see him! Couldn't I go to him, for only an hour?" she begged.

"Sorry. It can't be allowed."

Belle stepped out onto the sidewalk in a more unhappy mood than she would have thought possible. The December wind whipped around her, pulling strands of hair loose. As a stern military officer sat down beside her in the carriage, she began to worry about the dangerous envelopes against her breast. Every time she breathed she was conscious of the risk she was running. When at last she reached Fortress Monroe she heard the officer give the order:

"She's to be kept under close guard till the exchange boat leaves."

"I'll tell General Butler," came the answer.

Belle had a freezing sensation; nobody had let her know that she would be in the hands of Ben Butler.

A moment later a soldier touched her arm. "You're wanted in the Provost's office, miss." There she was startled to see her baggage piled up before the Provost.

"Your keys, please."

"Why do you have to search my things? I've just left a Union prison."

"Give us the keys!"

Belle gave them to the questioner. Two women and a man then dug into the sides and bottoms of her trunk and bonnet boxes. They drew up the army supplies that had been smuggled in to her. "Now, how did these get there?" The inspector glared at her, and she did not answer. When they found Jackson's field glasses, which she still carried with her, the girl turned a pleading look on the officer. "They belonged to someone very dear to me. You certainly don't need them."

He handed the glasses to an assistant. "List this with the other things. Now, miss, you'll be searched."

Belle bit her lip. "Please, I can promise you I have no contraband on me." Money wasn't contraband, or was it? she asked herself.

Glancing at the clock, the officer hesitated. "Well, if you take an oath that you have none, no letters or papers, you won't be searched."

Belle reflected. In her purse she had placed the letters of introduction; she decided to show them and as he accepted them the Unionist asked, "Any money?"

Silently she gave him the first roll of Confederate dollars.

Flipping through them, he sniffed. "You can keep that stuff."
Drawing her coat nervously around her, Belle saw attendants
transfer her belongings to the exchange vessel. She had managed
to save the money, the most important of her possessions.

At the Spottswood Hotel in Richmond Belle disposed at once of the money entrusted to her and settled down for a short interlude before deciding on future plans. Whatever she did, it would have something to do with the war; that went without saying. For a week she called at various offices, went to receptions and a few parties at the home of friends. The city was more crowded, more war-shabby than ever. Yet she could enjoy it, and regard the future more calmly now than she had during her last two visits. Cliff McVay had receded to the dim edges of her mind, and she looked forward to the day when Ben Boyd would join her.

On a Saturday evening she attended a small dinner party, and went to bed in good spirits. When the maid appeared, earlier than scheduled, she seemed troubled. "Miss, a officer downstairs jus' give me this letter."

Belle began a casual reading. Captain Hatch regretted to be a bearer of bad news. As soon as Miss Boyd had dressed, he wished to call on her with the hotel manager's wife. A few minutes later, hastily dressed, and combed, she sent the maid down, and shortly the Captain stood in the doorway. "Miss Belle, you'd known your father was ill?" He paused. "It happened . . . that is, he died just the other day."

The manager's wife came in and Belle leaned against her. Four months ago she had seen how much Ben suffered under his burdens; and hadn't she been responsible for many of them? In this first moment of shock she began to blame herself. Then suddenly she realized with painful clarity that she was removed farther than ever from her family, from Mary and her sister and brothers. As long as the war lasted, she might never go home.

# Part Four

# EXILE

". . . one of the most active and most reliable of the many secret women agents of the Confederacy."

-Douglas Southall Freeman

#### 15

IN AFTER YEARS Belle often marveled at the sequence of events that sent her in 1863 from place to place—the delays, the changes in schedule, the sudden decisions which were her life until the day she looked up to see Samuel Hardinge before her. Precisely when she made up her mind to try to cross the Atlantic on a mission for the Confederacy she would never be able to say.

For several months after her release from Washington City she went from town to town in the South, carrying messages for military or civilian officials, hoping always to get back to her family.

It was a long time before she recovered from the blow of her father's death. Friends told how Ben had dropped into a last sleep in Washington just the day after her arrival in Richmond. She had been constantly in his mind. Toward the end, as he lay dying, he thought Belle had come into the room, standing just beyond his bed.

If only she could join the family for a week! As Belle cried over the letter, a Confederate Congressman at Mrs. Wright's boardinghouse commiserated with her. "Perhaps we can persuade the Union people to let you go to your mother in Martins-

burg for a short visit." He wrote in her behalf, as did several of the exchange officials.

When they had no response, Belle addressed her own appeals to Secretary Stanton and to Abraham Lincoln himself. But gradually she realized that it was hopeless. . . .

The war news was grim. All over the South the Union held its gains in captured territory. There was less movement now; each side held tenaciously to what it had and tried to inch its lines forward. Attitudes were harsher, methods more brutal. Civilians suffered violently, and tales spread of outrages and unauthorized raids. And yet she would not give up hope. The South's will to fight continued strong, and though its losses were heavy, so were those of the North. Whichever side first lost its spirit would go down in defeat; Belle had not lost hers, nor had most of those around her.

Increasingly, she realized, the South depended on supplies brought in from abroad by the blockade runners off the coast. The first suggestion that she go to Europe came to Belle from Mrs. Wright, who was seconded by several others at the house. "The trip would be good for you, Belle," Mrs. Wright argued. "At the same time you could be of real service to the South. You know, Mrs. Greenhow's gone over there and won us a lot of support with her stories of the war." It was a warming, tempting idea.

Soon Belle consulted a Richmond official, who showed her a confidential letter telling of Rose Greenhow's success in London. Within a week he notified her that Jefferson Davis had given his approval of her proposed trip and the Secretary of State would designate her as a carrier of Confederate dispatches to England. Overnight Belle was absorbed in the project; this was the excitement, the adventure for which she yearned. She was to go to Wilmington, the booming North Carolina port, take a boat to Bermuda, and then another across the Atlantic.

On March 29 of 1864 she started out by train, her eyes bright, plans well laid. At last after several delays she rode into Wilmington, the sheaf of her official papers tucked inside her blouse.

Jumping from the car, she almost fell into the arms of a bearded officer who awaited her.

"Whoa," he laughed. "No need to go quite so fast. Your ship's already gone."

"Then, then . . ." She stammered. "Can't I take the next one?"

"You can," he nodded as he directed the handling of her trunk. "But that won't be for another two weeks."

Keyed to the anticipation of an immediate departure, Belle looked disconsolately around her. During the next ten days she went aimlessly about the teeming city. Not for years had she seen such prosperity, such piles of expensive goods. Now she could understand the whispered stories about the fantastic returns from blockade running. One night she was approached at her hotel by a man who asked quietly:

"Isn't this Miss Boyd?"

Instantly she recognized an old family friend: "Major Bier? Weren't you with Stonewall, and—"

Glancing around, the dapper officer tapped his lips. "Sh. It's now Captain Henry of the *Greyhound*, just in on Her Britannic Majesty's Service." She stared in confusion at his Confederate naval dress, and the tall, graying man took her arm. "Let's have supper over here."

After they had taken an isolated table, the Captain explained. "I was injured under Stonewall, and had to leave the Army. I'd been in the old United States Navy, you remember—and, I thought, why not go back to the sea?" He winked, and she gathered that the British flag was only a device to help in getting through the blockade. "We leave again as soon as the moon's right."

For the next few days Belle moved discreetly between the hotel and the docks, saying nothing of her mission. At Wilmington, one of the Confederacy's last remaining points for blockade running, the Union supposedly had many secret agents. On a late May afternoon she went by tug to a gray, three-masted steamer, riding low in the Cape Fear River.

Bowing, the Captain led her toward two fellow passengers. "Gentlemen, this is Mrs. Lewis," he said, using the pseudonym they had chosen as a precaution. Belle's surprise was instantaneous. "Why, I know you, sir," she said to a dark man with a high forehead and sardonic air. It was Pollard, a Richmond editor.

The journalist greeted her with considerable restraint, and his younger companion followed the master's lead. It seemed clear that he did not approve of a woman passenger on a blockade runner.

A maid-of-all-work greeted Belle in her cabin, which was freshly painted and surprisingly neat. A little later she realized that the *Greyhound* had dropped anchor. She ran to the deck and discovered that they had reached the river mouth, where they would wait until the moon waned.

Belle was tense as they glided forward, lights out, the ghost-like crew slipping around noiselessly. Belle's eyes strained in the darkness. Some six miles out waited the Union fleet. Let them get through, let the Yankee lookouts miss them . . . Losing track of time, Belle clung to the rail, head raised, the salt tang in her mouth, spray dampening her face. Several hours must have passed before the Captain whispered, "Well, we're past the blockade line."

Much relieved, she went to her cabin, and slept heavily. All at once she woke, and the maid told her: "Noon, ma'am. I admire the way you can go right off." Belle's head ached, and she rejected the tea and biscuit offered by the girl. On deck she found the crewmen still on guard on the cotton bales. The day had a gray overcast, a dull mistiness, and the waves were enormous.

Suddenly the air brightened, the haze washed away. The man on the masthead called out sharply, "Sail ho!"

Mr. Pollard ran aft and Belle followed, her illness forgotten. There lay a small, dark shape, five or six miles off. Across the deck sailors scurried, Captain Henry bellowed, and she fell back out of their way. In a mounting panic she listened to the cries from the lookout:

"She's bearing east, sir. A side-wheeler—bearing directly for us!"

A few feet from Belle the Captain yelled, "Give her her way!" Crew members raced off to the engine room and in a few minutes extra steam made the *Greyhound* throb under their feet.

Belle looked from the *Greyhound* to her pursuer. The chase was narrowing; the enemy continued to gain. The spray splattering into her face, she reminded herself of the government dispatches she carried; the Union considered that a major crime. Also, she had been arrested twice before; what would a third capture mean?

Suppose they fired on the *Greyhound* . . . Belle corrected herself; they would, of course, but how soon? The crew worked more furiously than ever. The other vessel turned into the wind, a puff of gray blossomed in the air, and at almost the same second she heard a singing, rocking sound over the *Greyhound's* bow. A heavy boom . . . the shell had hit the water a few yards off.

"Oh, God." As the Captain groaned Belle turned her head and saw the reason for his despair. The other ship's decks and wheelhouse were thick with men.

"But they haven't got us yet." The Captain pounded the deck rail. "All right, all right, let's shove 'em over." At his order the crew grabbed one cotton bale after another and threw it over the side. Those bales, the most valuable thing in the South, were being tossed into the Atlantic like refuse. And still Captain Henry had not given up. "More steam, more steam!" he cried. The shots came faster, cleaving the water.

Then he glanced at Belle. "If you weren't on board, I'd burn 'er to the water before I'd let 'em get one bale!"

"I'm not afraid. Burn her now." Belle would have lit the first match. But it was too late, and slowly Captain Henry's face lost its look of defiance. His eyes were bitter. "Belle, we've got to surrender."

There was nothing to be said; she stood in bleak silence as he gave the signal and the engines stopped. She saw signs of frantic activity on the big ship across the water, and heard the call: "Steamer a-hoy-y-y! Haul down that flag or we'll send you a broadside."

Through her tears Belle watched the British colors slowly descend. She thought then of the papers in her cabin, documents that could destroy her, and she hastened in. With trembling hands she ripped her confidential dispatches from the stitching at her waist and rushed to the engine room. Into the furnace she thrust the shredded sheets, together with several letters to Londoners.

"Miss Belle." The Captain paused before her. "Look, I have funds of my own, bills I'm hoping to save. Mr. Pollard"—the Captain frowned—"he's bound to get into an argument. I heard you say you have a money belt. Could you put this with yours?" He handed her a roll of bills.

By the time Belle had hidden the money a shout from the deck sent her out to find what was happening. After a brief exchange between Captain Henry and the officer of the small boarding boat, the two men left for conferences on the victorious ship, the U.S.S. *Connecticut*.

A junior officer assumed charge, a weak-chinned ensign named Swasey.

"Mrs. Lewis, you go downstairs," he said sharply. "Sergeant of the guard! Put a man in front of her door, and tell him to force her back if she comes out."

Furious, Belle went to her cabin. Sound of smashing glass indicated that the sailors had broken into the Captain's private stores. Several hiccuping, smirking carousers passed her door.

From the Captain's quarters new shouts arose: "Bring 'er in for a drink!" "Let's have a lil dancing." She would soon have to cope with them somehow, Belle thought. Then she saw a boat cross the water from the *Connecticut*. Whoever it might bring, at least he would be sober.

She watched anxiously as a young ensign's head, then his broad shoulders appeared over the rail. He removed his hat, and the wind lifted the long brown hair that framed his clean-shaven face.

Wide, dark eyes surveyed the deck and in them Belle read a quick intelligence. Her glance went to his trim waist and the firm set of his chin. He was a rather different type from the other Unionists on board.

As he passed the open door of her cabin, he apparently did not notice Belle. Though she would not call him handsome, the ensign's tanned face showed strength and self-possession. Quietly she asked the sentry, "Who's that?"

"Mr. Hardinge, Sam Hardinge. Oh, he's from New Hamp-shire, but he's been living in New York, I think."

New Hampshire—probably an abolitionist; Belle frowned to herself. Listening intently, she noticed that the carousing sailors grew silent as the newcomer spoke: "By the Captain's orders, I'm to relieve you of command," she heard him say to Ensign Swasey.

A step sounded outside her cabin, Ensign Hardinge bowed at the door. His dark eyes gave her an inquiring glance, and quickly his look softened. "May I come in, Mrs. Lewis?"

"Certainly." Belle nodded, and for a reason that she could not have explained she added pertly, "I know when I'm a prisoner."

In the Ensign's deep-set eyes, under heavy overhanging brows, she saw a glint of interest and a spark of humor. "I hope you'll consider yourself a passenger, not a prisoner," he answered.

"Thank you; I hope I may." This young man had a graceful manner. As Mr. Hardinge continued to regard her with a thoughtful air, she motioned to the other chair. Taking the seat, he asked a few questions.

"Oh yes, I'm from Virginia," Belle told him, parrying his inquiries. "A town so small you never heard of it up where you come from."

"I might have heard of your town, you know." He leaned back, arms folded, and suddenly smiled. "In New York a great many of us Yankees"—almost imperceptibly he stressed the word—"have had Southern friends."

He looked out of the porthole and pointed out to Belle another small boat on its way from the Connecticut. "That's Cap-

tain Henry returning, to stay on with the ship. Wouldn't you like to go on deck?"

Captain Henry appeared rather chastened yet still in control of himself. After a junior officer called the Ensign aside, Mr. Hardinge announced, "Most of this crew will be taken to the Connecticut and replaced by Union men." For the next half hour Belle watched the exchange of silent, gloomy Southerners for jubilant Unionists.

Sam Hardinge came up with the Captain. "We'll soon be under way," he said to her, and amusement lighted his long face as he added, "Miss Boyd."

Before a denial rose to her lips, the Ensign's smile widened. "I knew it from the beginning."

"You did? How?"

Intervening, Captain Henry told her with a grimace: "One of our fine fellow-Southerners did it. Yesterday the *Connecticut* captured another blockade runner, and one of the officers gave them a tip about us."

So that explained how they had been trapped so far out at sea. Her eyes were drawn by Mr. Hardinge's, and she read in them a clear compassion. "Miss Boyd, it mayn't turn out as badly as you think. Why don't you wait and see how things develop?"

They might develop very badly, of course, but this young man's words gave her a certain reassurance. That afternoon the *Greyhound*, now officially the prize vessel, started northward astern of the *Connecticut*.

16

THIRTY-SIX HOURS later Belle sat beside her bunk in the tossing *Greyhound*, staring disconsolately out into the opaque gray distance. Somewhere over there, hidden behind curtains of rain, lay the grim outlines of Fortress Monroe, with Ben Butler

in charge; and at any moment instructions might arrive for her to be brought before him.

For hours they had tied up in the James River beyond Hampton Roads. When Sam had left her earlier this morning to report to the *Roanoke*, he said good-by with a tight frown. "Belle, I've asked and asked, but nobody in the Navy can say, or will say, what's going to be done in the case." With a look more troubled than her own he went through the rain to the waiting boat.

During the last day or so they had seen each other every few hours, while Captain Henry, as Belle suspected, took care to stay out of their way. She had watched Sam Hardinge's growing worry over her danger, and the tender concern in his eyes. Thus far he had said nothing that was definite; as for herself she knew she was very much in love. Yet that knowledge brought only harsh uncertainty. Someone with her background, and a man in Sam's position . . . what could lie ahead for them?

An hour or so later Belle discerned a little bobbing boat fighting its way toward them. It must be Sam—her eyes probed the gloom—and two or three others from the ironclad. Did they bring bad news?

After a quiet knock Sam stood at her door. Closing it behind him, he took her hands. "I've got to speak fast, Belle." His words were earnest. "They want to see you and the Captain, for some questions. Say as little as you can, and let me do most of the talking." Gratefully she caught his arm, and at that moment a heavy-set, poker-faced officer appeared with two junior navy men behind him.

"So this is Miss Belle Boyd." His eyes went swiftly over her. The fiction of "Mrs. Lewis" had, alas, long since gone by the board. The group took seats in the cabin, and the leader, Captain Gansevoort, inquired about the circumstances under which Belle had set sail on the *Greyhound*.

As she began to answer, Captain Henry came in and the Union officer glanced up in surprise and beamed. Obviously the two men had known each other in former navy days.

Captain Henry talked learnedly about the rights of neutral

vessels captured at sea. Then Captain Gansevoort declared, "All of you will be taken to New York and on to Massachusetts. The matter won't be finished until there's a prize court up in Boston. In any case . . . Captain, you can have a parole as far as Boston. As for you, miss, I'll take your verbal promise, and you can go ashore too, if you like, in New York—if Ensign Hardinge accompanies you."

As she thanked the officer, Belle felt a rush of elation. Nothing had been finally settled, of course; yet the next few days brought comparative serenity—and an hour with Sam for which Belle had been waiting.

The evening was balmy when they found themselves at their secluded spot near the bow. "Belle, I'm not sure how this thing's going to end for you or the Captain. The facts can be used to make a bad case against him, and that's what some of them want. . . ." Sam suddenly appeared angry and fearful. "All this hatred and fighting!"

After a moment's silence he continued, and what he said would color Belle's thoughts for months to follow. "Belle, during these past few days I've been talking to people on our side wherever we've stopped, and I've heard about what's going on under the surface, all over the North. The fact is, the Union's tired, dog-tired of the war, and there's a movement spreading in lots of places—a peace movement."

Belle stared in surprise as Sam raced on. "The national election comes again in November, you know, and a dozen people have told me there'll be a strong Northern party with a candidate against Lincoln, on a peace platform. Millions of Unionists want this thing over. Belle, you can't imagine the horrible losses. No wonder they call Grant a butcher—shoving men into his meat grinder, caring for nothing but victory at any price." He thumped the deck rail. "Whatever Lincoln and Stanton think, they can't keep this feeling down. There's dissatisfaction everywhere in the North; for more than three years we've been giving up fathers and sons and brothers, and still there's no end to it.

. Once we get a new President, the war will be in its last days!"

Belle's eyes widened in amazement. "We," Sam had said; then he considered himself part of the movement, or at least sympathetic to it. How wonderful that this new hope had arisen.

Sam's hand pressed her shoulder. "Belle, if things work out, could—would you want to be with me in New York? We could get married as soon as possible and go there when the war's over." His arm tightened around her, and his voice was unsteady. "That is, if you'd want me for a husband."

"Sam, I'd want you," she said simply. "But let's wait for a while. There's so much we've got to consider. You know the Union may hold me for a long time."

This possibility made him start, and he gathered her tightly into his arms. Belle forgot everything except the man beside her.

As the *Greyhound* neared New York Harbor, a wind swept away the persistent fog. Sitting comfortably in the deckhouse beside Sam, Belle looked at the island of Manhattan, with its long streets of astonishing buildings, six and seven stories high. "I'm going to show you the city, or as much as we can see in the time we have," he reminded her, and she nodded serenely.

A pause, and Sam added quietly, "I'll be able to visit my family, between duties, and have a talk with my father." Wouldn't he want her to meet them? Though her eyes asked the question, Belle said nothing more. Perhaps it was wise for him to prepare the family for her; nevertheless she felt a slight hurt.

Soon after they anchored off the Navy Yard, Belle saw her maid gazing toward the dock. "All those people there—watchin' for something." Belle had only to step on deck and fingers pointed excitedly. The papers had obviously begun to write about her again. This attention would not help her case or the Captain's, she reflected uneasily.

Sam, however, had anticipated the problem. "I've arranged at least to spare you from being stared at," he said when they prepared to leave. A Navy Yard tug slid alongside the *Greyhound* and, out of sight of the throng, Belle, Sam, and Captain Henry settled in the tiny wheelhouse. At the Canal Street land-

ing Captain Henry, now on parole, waved a cheery good-by, and she and Sam rode toward the home of one of the Hardinges' friends, Mrs. Bannister, with whom Belle was to stay.

Alone in her room, an hour later Belle touched her hand to the May roses in her hair, pinched her cheeks, and tightened the waist of her freshly steamed red velvet gown. Tensions still showed in her eyes, but the prospect of an evening with Sam had given her a softened look. As she reached the lower hall, the maid answered a ring, and Captain Henry stood at the door, grinning.

When they were alone in the parlor he spoke urgently: "I had to come, and I've kept my cab waiting. This is our only chance to bank our money, yours and mine, so that the Union won't know anything about it. Boston will be too late." Belle nodded; the money belt was in her room, and there she hastily removed part of her own funds—enough to support her for a short time to come. The North might confiscate whatever it found on her, and she thought it best not to carry too much.

When Sam walked into the parlor ten minutes later, he took both her hands and murmured, "You're lovely tonight." As he helped her into the vehicle outside, on their way to a theater and late supper, he smiled. "Do you realize this is the first time we've been really alone?"

In a haze of happiness Belle relaxed in his arms; the great city of New York was nonexistent for both of them.

They entered the theater lobby, gaudy with rich brocade and feathers. Belle had seen no such festivity since her days in Washington before the war. Her eyes shone when they sat across from each other for supper afterward. A slow ride home in the cool evening, and later they stood in Mrs. Bannister's hallway.

"Belle, what about us?"

She put her fingers to Sam's lips. "Both of us promised we wouldn't be serious, didn't we?"

He made a mock grimace and kissed her. Then suddenly she could not hold back a last question: "Did you speak to your father?"

He shook his head. "He arrived just as I was leaving, but I'm to see him now." His face had a look of pain. "Dear, I want you there, you know. Under the circumstances, though, I'd best bring up the subject myself and—do the explaining."

In the morning one of the other officers called for Belle; Sam was needed, as he had feared he would be, to complete some details on shore. Aboard the *Greyhound*, she sat alone for nearly an hour. When at last she called out an answer to his knock, Sam entered swiftly, stood behind her, and put his arms around her waist. He kissed the back of her neck, her throat and cheeks. She sighed happily. Then, with his cheek against hers, he said, "I saw Father last night, Belle, for an hour. I worked up to the subject, as well as I could." He swallowed, and stared out at the water. "Even then—well, it went badly. My brother came in and took his side and—and Father shouted and I suppose I did too. I finally walked out with nothing settled and this morning when I left he stayed in his room."

"Oh, my dear." Belle held his hands. A family quarrel over her . . .

"Belle . . ." As he cleared his throat she knew what he was going to ask, and she looked deeply into his eyes. "Yes," she told him, "as soon as we get clear of this—this trouble, Sam." Perhaps it would have been wiser or cleverer to wait before giving him an answer, to let him wonder a bit longer . . . Nevertheless she couldn't have done it.

There was a knock and when the Captain approached his first glance at their faces made him smile. On a sudden impulse Belle whispered to Sam, who nodded. "We don't know yet when we can have the ceremony," she told her friend, "but we'd like you there."

Captain Henry gave them a delighted grin. "I'm glad, very glad." For two more days, as the *Greyhound* followed the coast, Belle and Sam were together as much as possible. Then shortly before they were scheduled to arrive outside Boston the Captain sought her out, his face more somber than she had seen it in some time.

"Girl, I've delayed this until I can't wait any longer." His eyes were bright with unmasked fear. "Things will go pretty hard for me once they get me before that court. . . ." The Captain became intent. "Well, my parole extends only to Boston, you remember. I'm going to try to get away as soon as we reach the port. If I can only slip in to a certain little hotel, my friends will watch out for me."

Her face must have disclosed her mixed hope and fear, for he hurried on: "I may need a hand from you. I want you to help divert attention for a moment or two if I can find the chance to escape. Oh, you won't be risking anything for yourself, and it may save me."

Belle's involuntary hesitation suddenly filled her with shame. "Of course, I'll do it, whatever it is, risk or not," she insisted. "But—could it injure Sam?"

"I wouldn't think so. My parole ends and so does his responsibility, when we get to Boston. Still, if you think you shouldn't, I might be able to work it out alone."

"No!" She shook her head. After all the Captain had done for her there could be no question.

In Boston Harbor small boats darted in and out of the crowded area, blowing whistles, signaling one another. On deck Belle saw little or no guard; everything seemed to be working to the Captain's advantage.

Sam sent a call for a harbor vessel to take him to shore. "They're waiting for my report," he remarked casually as he passed Belle and the Captain. A few minutes later the Captain whispered to her and nodded his head toward the two pilots who had boarded the ship. He invited them below for a glass of wine from his store. Her heart hammering, Belle drew the two men into conversation; as he had planned, the Captain reached for his hat and went casually out.

Almost at once Sam put his head in the door. Belle gave a nervous start; he must have missed the Captain by a hairsbreadth. "Are my papers here?" he asked.

She replied truthfully, "They must be in the lower cabin. Didn't you just come from there?"

He disappeared below, and at that moment, as Belle glanced through the porthole, she saw the Captain step into the harbor boat in Sam's place. After a time Sam went up, shrugged when he found no boat there, and summoned another. After that Belle waited alone, nervously watching the water.

At dark Sam returned, and after him walked a precise, close-lipped man. "The United States Marshal," Sam explained, and the new arrival bowed coldly. "I'll be obliged, miss, if you tell me where the Captain is." The meticulous voice gave the request a ceremonial sound.

"He's on deck, I suppose," Belle murmured. For the next hour she heard signs of searching and questioning of the crew; finally the Marshal reappeared, and announced flatly, "We'll find him; our police force is the best." Her eyes sought Sam's. Would they blame her? Though somewhat disturbed Sam said with a look of reassurance, "Sorry we've held you up like this. The Marshal and I are taking you to a hotel, where you'll stay for a few days."

Their departure was a silent one. On shore Belle turned for a last view of the *Greyhound*. She had expected adventure when she boarded it, but scarcely all that had happened. At the hotel the Marshal made a short speech: "Your case should be settled soon, and then I hope to have the pleasure of escorting you to safety—Canada, perhaps. Or the unpleasant task of delivering you to the commandant at Fort Warren."

Belle's mouth fell open. It was the first time that anyone had mentioned Canada; that prospect astonished her. But the other—the Union fort with its dark cells . . . The threat was terrifying.

In the morning she received a note from Sam. He was doing everything he could, and she must not lose heart, whatever she heard.

The next morning the maid handed her the newspaper, which carried a story about her.

... Miss Belle Boyd, the famous rebel spy, was on board ... She converses freely and well, and is evidently a female of intelligence and quick understanding. Her bearing during the passage—in act and speech—is described as strictly becoming and proper in all respects. She entertains and expresses strong admiration of, sympathy with, the South, but not in offensive terms ... She is a tall, well-formed female, blonde, and graceful in her manners. There is much curiosity to see her ... During the attack upon the *Greyhound* Miss B. came on deck, took a seat upon a bale of cotton, and quietly sat fanning herself and watching the explosion of the shells. ...

The last words made her start. Who had imagined that detail? Nevertheless the story had a friendly note and that was a blessing. She dropped the sheet, and asked where Sam could be. It was late afternoon before he came, and his face had all the strain of the past few days. She reached out and held him. "I've been so worried!"

Sam's voice was hoarse. "I'm worried, too, Belle. Nobody can tell me what they're going to do with you." Her arms tightened about him. After a moment he added, "Your mother's sent a telegraph wire to the Marshal, asking if she can be with you for a while."

Belle's delight flooded her face, until Sam said more slowly, "But it won't be allowed." Only thirty-six hours separated her from Mary Boyd, and they could not exchange even a censored letter, she thought bitterly. Sam cried in fury, "This government—those tyrants in Washington! It makes you ashamed, makes you want to—" His words choked in his throat, and in the silence they clung together.

A few days later it was officially conceded that Captain Henry had escaped. Confined to her room though she was, Belle sensed an increase in the resentment directed at Sam. When he called again she asked him bluntly, "Aren't they blaming you more and more?"

His look gave him away and she knew that she was correct. "They've questioned me and everybody else on the *Greyhound*. But the matter's been referred to Washington."

During the next few days Belle waited in an agony of tension. On Sunday evening the Marshal knocked, eyes gleaming. "Miss Boyd, I am privileged to tell you this. Tomorrow night you leave the United States, and I shall escort you to Canada."

"What about Mr. Hardinge?"

The Marshal's nostrils widened with a touch of disdain. "The commandant of the Navy Yard has summoned him and his fellow officers to a hearing, starting early tomorrow."

Her last twenty-four hours in Boston were desperate ones. Long hours passed without further news, until at last the manager himself brought Sam's message: "It's marked urgent, Miss Boyd."

. . . It is all up with me. Mr. Hall, the engineers and myself are prisoners, charged with complicity in the escape of Captain H. The Admiral says that it looks bad for us; so I have adopted a very good motto, viz.: "Face the music!" and, come what may, the officers under me shall be cleared. I have asked permission of the Admiral to come and bid you goodbye. I hope that his answer will be in the affirmative.

How like Sam it was to insist that he take the responsibility, that his assistants not be blamed. Late that afternoon, as she stood surrounded by her bags, he entered. "I'm paroled till dawn. Don't cry, please. Make no mistake about it. Belle, they can't keep me from following you, sooner or later, wherever you go."

"No, they can't." She echoed his words. But even as she did Belle wondered: How long would it be before they met again?

## 17

ON HER ARRIVAL two days later at Niagara on the Canadian side, she found the ebullient Captain Henry awaiting her with his smiling wife. At his buoyant greeting her own spirits lifted. Even as she remembered all the trouble the Captain had caused

with his escape, her resentment disappeared. And when Mrs. Henry heard about Sam, she squeezed Belle's hand and spoke with a sympathetic murmur: "Things will work out; you'll see."

It was a day later that a Confederate agent in Canada brought her a crisp message. Ensign Hardinge had been ordered held indefinitely under guard on a Union vessel.

The Henrys comforted her as best they could, and after a time the Captain broke into her reverie. "Belle, there's something else concerning me now. I'm still hoping to get your funds and mine out of the New York bank, but we have to wait until things calm down a bit." She nodded; she had real use for the money, though she had a little to maintain her for the time.

Later that day Belle became aware that the Captain's eye had an excited new gleam. "Well," she smiled slowly, "out with it. What's happened?"

"Just this." He let out a long, happy breath. "You know the national election's just a few months off—in the North, that is. The movement against Lincoln's policies is getting stronger and stronger. Every day there's more talk of a good candidate against him, on a peace platform!"

Captain Henry bent excitedly forward. "From a dozen sources we get reports that Lincoln himself is in the dumps, going around with a face long enough to trail the ground. And don't think there aren't some good Southerners traipsing about, helping stir up feeling here and there!" As he grinned Belle recalled rumors of Confederate activities designed to promote dissension, even uprisings, in the North.

So the Captain might have a part in some of this. But she knew better than to ask. Since her arrival in Canada she had heard of an astonishing secret network of both Southern and Northern activities, spreading across the border and back into the United States. As Captain Henry talked Belle noticed for the first time two dandified men at the next table, striking for the rare neatness of their dress and their mustaches waxed à la Napoléon.

She whispered a warning and after discreet inspection the

Captain decided they were Union agents. The next morning and afternoon the same pair managed to sit next to Belle and the Henrys. "It's time for us to move on, anyway." The Captain frowned. "Why don't you go to Europe and work as you'd planned? Sam could follow you there."

Belle pondered the advice. The Canadian Government had proved itself friendly to the Confederates, yet she could accomplish nothing important here. Sam had said he would join her "wherever you go." Still undecided, she started with the Henrys toward the port of Quebec. At the railroad station they felt relieved to discover no signs of the men with the waxed mustaches. They enjoyed a quiet trip to Toronto; but there, descending from the cars, they promptly spotted the same agents, who had obviously come in by the same train.

Wearily Belle and the Henrys continued to Montreal, and there the Union pair reappeared. The Captain slipped off for a long conference with Confederate representatives in the town, then rejoined her and Mrs. Henry with an intent look. "I'm to get away from the Yanks, and go to Halifax. There'll be a carriage near here after dark, and we have a trick or two arranged." He seemed very regretful. "Belle, I suppose this is good-by."

She found herself close to tears. At the door the Captain attempted a smile. "Well, miss, you'll have to get married without us." Sadly Belle nodded, and began to think again of Sam. Where was he, how was he? It was then that she made up her mind; for better or for worse, she would hunt out the Southern agents in this city. Within forty-eight hours she had received funds to resume her interrupted trip to Europe, and encouragement to continue in her work for the South.

During her last few days in Montreal Northern representatives watched her during every waking hour. By now she had learned to spot such an agent in a moment. Ignoring him, she made quiet arrangements for her trip, and meanwhile inquired every twelve hours or so for word about Sam, or letters from him.

On her last day in Montreal she made a final check: "You're sure there's no message from the United States?" As the hotel

manager shook his head, she left for her ship. Her last sight, ironically, was of a tall individual in a high brown hat—another Union agent, who would, of course, report that she had started for England.

The first day or two of her trip went smoothly. For the most part she kept to herself; the Confederates in Canada had warned her against curious questioners.

Then off the Newfoundland banks their ship ran into thick fogs that showed no sign of abating, and the Captain ordered the engines stopped. Belle was startled when a great blue-white iceberg drifted through the thick mists. Awed, she searched the fog for others, and understood the reason for the long delay.

Finally they entered English waters, and she stood on deck, trying to pierce the gray mist for her first glimpse of shore. When Liverpool came into sight, Belle wanted to drop to her knees in thanks.

In Canada she had been given the name of an attorney friend of the South. She went directly to his dusty office, and met a preoccupied man behind a cluttered desk. The solicitor looked up regretfully and answered her question. "Sorry, miss. We've received a few confidential messages this past week, but none for you."

On the way to London she gazed from her train window at the green English countryside. She had left word for Sam in half a dozen places. Suppose he missed one link in the chain of messages? Or by now he might have sent a letter that failed to reach her.

In London she directed the Cockney driver to the Brunswick Hotel in the Piccadilly section, one of the two addresses she had. There she decided that immediately after freshening herself she would go to the Confederate representative, Mr. Henry Hotze. It was a long walk, but she needed to save cab fare. Forty minutes later she waited before a door, her hands clenched in panic. What would she do if Mr. Hotze proved unfriendly?

A big, austere man, with drooping gray mutton-chop whisk-

ers, rose to greet her with a penetrating stare. "What did you say your name was?" So he would be hostile. . . . "Oh, Miss Boyd?" The smile came quickly, and Mr. Hotze's eyes lighted. "I expected someone—quite different. Sit down, young lady; they told me you'd be coming nearly two weeks back. What delayed you?"

His welcome was so spontaneous that Belle choked with emotion. "Why, what is it?" the man asked in surprise, and added lightly, "Miss Boyd, I've been wondering about something. You didn't really jump on a horse and lead Stonewall into battle, did you?"

The question had precisely the right effect. Her fingers touched her eyes for a second and she laughed. "Mr. Hotze, my last word at home was that I should do anything you and the others wish, and I'm ready to go wherever you like, and—"

"Of course, of course!" The Confederate held up his hand. "I've met many a ready worker, but it's wonderful to see such a spirit. There's one little matter, though . . ."

Belle's eyes searched his. There was always, she reflected tartly, one little matter. Mr. Hotze glanced over in amusement. "Weren't you looking for—well, a personal note?" Reaching into his desk, he held out a creased letter. She took it with a cry and read it at once, without apology. Sam had written from a London hotel! He had been released and had taken the first boat, one faster than hers. His first words told her that, receiving no word and hearing she was due here, he had decided she must have gone to France to see the Southern agents there; and he would now be in Paris.

Belle lowered her trembling hand. So near, and yet still separated . . . "Why don't you telegraph a message to the address he gives?" Mr. Hotze began at once to compose the sentences for her. "Mr. Hardinge could be here by the morning after tomorrow," he assured her. Her mind was whirling, but she forced herself to return to the subject of her work. "Thank you. I'll be ready early tomorrow."

"Wouldn't you like to wait a few days before you start?" The

tall, gray man spoke gently; he had met Sam and understood a good deal of the situation.

"No, I'll be in the lobby at 8:30," Belle insisted.

Walking in the late afternoon, Sam's letter in her pocket, Belle found that she was seeing the city for the first time. She stared happily at the old roofs, the elegant circles, and spreading parks.

In the lobby, as Belle stopped at the manager's desk, she noticed a lean, well-dressed man at her elbow. His look and the way he stared carefully beyond her betrayed him as the Union agent he was. She felt indifferent; tonight she had happier subjects to occupy her thoughts.

Belle looked joyfully out from her room into the gathering dusk as the lights went on in the Piccadilly area. Once more life had a purpose and she felt that she was needed. And Sam was not far away; he must already be on his way to her. She reread his note, and discovered that in her haste she had missed a line on the last sheet. "After holding me for so long, the U. S. Navy dismissed me for 'neglect of duty' in letting the Captain escape."

Poor Sam! It was hardly good news, and yet the verdict implied no dishonor. . . .

The next morning at 8:30 promptly Mr. Hotze met her down-stairs. "Miss Boyd," he chuckled, "even the calm rest of an innocent soul couldn't account for today's glow!" At the porter's desk she picked up several notes, signed by Confederate sympathizers, and a card with a message from Lady Gray. "You'll find her a generous friend of the South," Mr. Hotze murmured. "Meanwhile we're going to three offices and a late afternoon party. . . . Oh, no instructions. You need only be yourself and tell your own story."

Belle's spirits soared; she had reason to work with a stronger will. Through the morning and afternoon she stayed at the agent's side and talked to a great variety of people. She confined herself largely to her own experiences—a little of her secret activities, which appeared to intrigue her British listeners: the

military conference she had overheard, her trip to the battle lines with news for Jackson, her months in prison.

Between engagements her new mentor prompted her: "If you don't mind, keep off general military strategy." All in all, she saw that she had pleased this man who understood the British so much better than she did. She would earn the small regular payments she received as a Confederate agent.

Belle retired, exhausted with the day's effort, and woke several times from dreams of Sam. She and Mr. Hotze began early again the next day and she continued steadily until noon. With early afternoon, however, she remembered every few minutes that Sam might be coming into London now. She had received no further word, but he could easily be almost there.

The manager hastened up as she entered the hotel. "A telegraph wire, Miss Boyd; it arrived some hours ago." Belle's hand trembled, but before she could rip open the envelope a low laugh sounded behind her.

"No need to bother about the message, Belle. It says I'm on my way here."

She whirled around, her skirts swinging in a wide circle. Sam's happiness shone in his face. As their hands met the manager turned away, and Sam led her to a corner of the lobby. "Oh, this isn't the place," she began, but he had caught her to him.

When Belle drew away, her eyes went over him—the broadcloth civilian dress in which she had never seen him before, the freshly scrubbed look, the marked loss of weight, the signs of strain at the corners of his mouth.

"You've had a bad time of it." As her fingers caressed his, her voice broke. "It's been my fault, these things you've been through. Sam, if it hadn't been for me, you'd still be back there, in uniform."

"And swearing at myself for staying in a fight that my heart wasn't in." Gravely he shook his head. "Yes, I lost a lot of pounds in that sweatbox of a cabin; I didn't get out more than once or twice in the whole time. And it wasn't easy after that; I wasn't sure I'd really be allowed to leave the country."

Then his expression became harder. "You see, I suppose I was negligent on the ship, and deserved the verdict. But they had no reason to hold me on and on while they couldn't make up their minds. I was punished because I objected to the way your case was handled."

He had changed; there was a conviction, a force in his face that had not been there when she told him good-by. Quickly Belle told him of her work in London, and she had to put the question that had been so much in her thoughts: "You don't object, Sam? This won't embarrass you?"

"It will not." His emphasis let her know that he had settled the subject in his mind. "Don't you see? Everything that's happened has strengthened the—the views I've had for a long time.

. . And with the latest developments back home, Belle—well, the whole war may be over mighty soon, and not the way Lincoln and Stanton want it!"

Belle felt a flood of happy relief. There was nothing more to concern her; nothing, of course, but one last, all-important point, and a moment later Sam went directly to it. "I want the wedding in a week or less, as soon as we can go through with the requirements. On the boat they said we'd have to sign papers and . . ." Belle sat silent; it was enough for her now to listen, to be protected, to follow.

18

THE NEXT FEW DAYS were a rush of preparation for the wedding; visits to a dressmaker with a new Englishwoman friend of Belle, a call at the rectory of St. James's Chapel in Piccadilly, and parties which revealed the full size of the Southern colony in London. There were military officers of the Confederacy, merchants, shippers, journalists, and a group of onetime American diplomatic agents.

News of the approaching ceremony had spread and Belle felt

alarmed when she saw the articles about it in the British papers. Their length and the almost eager tone in which they were written surprised her and also made her a bit nervous. They told of the "romantic episode," declared that, as a captive of the Union officer, she had made him "her captive," and they reported endless presumed details of her life and Sam's.

With a disturbed frown she called on Mr. Hotze. "Won't this hurt our work here? Whenever I enter a room everyone will know what I've done—all too much about it."

Vigorously Mr. Hotze shook his head. "Whatever you've done helps tell our story. Just go on, and don't worry." Belle still could not believe that so much attention could benefit her or the cause. . . . In the last few days before the wedding there were two unexpected developments. From Canada, Captain Henry wrote that, in spite of a series of requests, the New York bank declined to give up his funds or Belle's until either of them, or an accredited representative, appeared in person. He himself could not cross the border without facing arrest, nor could she go. Did she know of anyone who might act for her?

The same week Sam received a message from his brother. Before leaving the United States, Sam had asked him to send on the money in his bank account. Now officials insisted that only Sam himself could draw it out. He and Belle exchanged glum looks; this was disturbing indeed. Talking over the matter in Mr. Hotze's office, Sam was obviously depressed. "I have only enough to last us a few more months here."

Silence followed his statement, and then Mr. Hotze said tentatively, "Some weeks from now I'll have a batch of messages to be started on their way to the South by a confidential carrier. If you're interested, Sam, I might be able to have you named for it. The main job would be to get the messages to other people who would take them into the South."

In midmorning of August 25, 1864, Sam and Belle stood together at the candlelight altar of St. James's Chapel. In the circle of subdued light Sam gazed earnestly ahead, before he turned to his bride with softened eyes. "I, Samuel Hardinge

. . ." Her hand trembled as he placed the ring on her finger.

The days stretched serenely before them. There were troubles about them, perhaps ahead; nevertheless she had a quiet confidence that she and Sam would get safely through whatever followed. The war and everything connected with it seemed far in the background, and their hour awaited.

They enjoyed a happy October. Sam began to attend some of Belle's meetings with Mr. Hotze and other Confederates; they were guests at teas and receptions, and several times they entertained British friends and Southerners. As she looked in the mirror, Belle told herself that the marriage had gone well.

She read a new calm in her expression, a quiet contentment. These past three years had been unsettled, full of good events and bad ones; but, as Sam said both of them had arrived at "safe harbor."

Smiling dreamily to herself, Belle repeated the words; and it was a happy harbor as well. Yet could it be more than a temporary one?

In the chill days of early fall the news in the London journals was ever more disheartening. After his early failures General Sherman had smashed into Atlanta, in a triumph that echoed over North and South. In her home region, the Shenandoah Valley, General Sheridan ended the shifting pattern of the war by pounding the Confederates in a devastating drive, destroying crops, driving away farm animals. "Like a plague of locusts," one Southern sympathizer muttered to Belle, and she shuddered for her family and their neighbors.

The spectacular victories spurred Union spirits to tremendous new enthusiasm. "The political situation has changed overnight," Mr. Hotze told Belle grimly. Lincoln, who had once feared he could not be re-elected, was promptly nominated by the Republicans; against him ran General McClellan, with the support of mixed groups. . . . "Yet McClellan still may win, mayn't he?" Belle asked Sam and Mr. Hotze. They nodded, but without conviction.

One day after the American election she waited nervously with Sam in the hotel lobby. Mr. Hotze had promised to bring the first reliable information from the *Times* office. An hour passed, and another. Sam's eyes were closed, and Belle told herself that he must be thinking, as she did, that if the news had been good, their friend would have come much sooner.

"Ah, there he is." Her husband's voice reached her as if from a long way off. Mr. Hotze was moving slowly toward them, his face gray, and Belle's hand caught Sam's at her side. Lincoln had carried the vote.

The next morning Mr. Hotze sent word that a ship would sail in twenty-four hours, and if Sam wished to go on the "errand" he would have to slip off within the hour.

His packing was simple; as she helped him Belle made an effort to be matter-of-fact, to hide her trembling. Only when he was ready to go did she pull him back. "Belle," he began unsteadily, "if you really don't want me to sail . . ." He held her closely.

For a long moment she fought the temptation to tell him to stay. Then she drew his face to hers and, crying softly, kissed him and let him leave. Standing at the window, she watched him enter a carriage that would go swiftly in one direction, transfer him to another, and thus, they trusted, escape Union surveillance. . . .

For the next few months Belle went mechanically about her duties, calling regularly at Mr. Hotze's office and those of other Southern representatives. Sam was to go from Boston to New York; from there she received a brief message, delivered through a third party. He had already disposed of his Southern communications, and she need worry no more about that part of his visit.

She read that he had seen his parents, and he regretted that there had been no reconciliation. They still had not forgiven him for what he had done, and he had left them after a grimly hostile meeting. . . .

As the days passed without further news she lost sleep; at



meetings with Londoners her smile was forced, her voice dulled. When she walked down the hotel stairs one morning, she found Mr. Hotze waiting solemnly for her.

"What is it? Please!"

He led her to the end of the lobby before he answered. "This isn't good news, I'm afraid. Sam's arrested."

"Arrested for what?"

"We're not sure, but one source says it's for desertion of the United States Navy."

Desertion, when he had been dismissed from the service? She had the official letter. "We'll know more later," Mr. Hotze assured her, trying to be comforting. "It may not be quite so bad. . . ."

Belle measured the following weeks by the scraps of information that arrived, each one more frightening than the last. "He's in the men's prison . . ." "They shifted him to the Old Capitol." He would be in the same prison that had held her. When she heard that, she resisted the impulse to shriek. As a woman, she had had better quarters than his would be, and, no matter what Mr. Hotze and the Londoners told her, prison conditions had grown far harsher in the North as well as the South. Feelings of hate and vengeance had increased as Lee and Grant faced each other in the gathering climax of the fighting about Richmond.

"Miss Belle, there's more word. Sam's been moved to Fort Delaware, and there's a report he's been put in irons." Each message brought her closer to despair. "Now they claim they're holding him as a Southern spy." "Some of our friends tried to send him food and clothes, and they were refused." "He's been sick, though we understand he's somewhat better." She realized the plight of anyone who fell ill in a war prison. Suppose—suppose something terrible happened to Sam there?

The war was going more and more badly for the South. Whole sectors were being lost to the North, and Grant still beat ruthlessly at Richmond. When Belle saw Confederate friends, she did not need to ask the news; their faces told the black story.

At that gloomy point she found that she was to have a baby. "What is it, my dear?" Mr. Hotze asked when she came into

his office on a winter morning of early 1865, her lips almost blue with the London cold. He looked anxiously into her face. "You're really not well." Unable to speak for a moment, she nodded her head.

"Is it a problem of money?" When Belle left Mr. Hotze, she had received the equivalent of forty-five dollars, which would help support her for another month, she estimated. He had told her sorrowfully: "If I had more on hand, I'd give it to you."

Only then did she realize fully the meagerness of the remaining Confederate resources. She had been unable to tell Mr. Hotze the news that had first delighted and then frightened her. She wanted desperately to get word to Sam that his child was on the way. Never had she felt so isolated, so desolate.

That night, sitting at the bare window of the Leicester Square restaurant, she glanced up to find the cheery, quick-witted owner hovering over her. At Belle's forlorn stare the Englishwoman smiled. "May I suggest something, Mrs. Hardinge? Why don't you write down the things you did in that war in the States? I can tell you ten friends, right off, who'd want to read it. The reason I thought of it, my sister that has a shop says a lady asked only the other day if she had a book with you in it. . . ."

Belle smiled. "You're kind, and once or twice I've wondered about something like that, but I never got around to it."

In her badly heated room, Belle looked down at her hands. She could not forget that intriguing suggestion. At this point she had little Confederate work to do, and she dreaded the prospect of idleness.

Slowly Belle took out a pen and several sheets of paper. How to start? She began with her early days in Shenandoah, and her visit to Washington just before the war. . . .

For a week she worked with almost no interruption, from early morning until long after dark. She declined invitations from British and Confederate friends in order to keep at her

work. And also she felt—foolish though it might be—a certain wish to withdraw from the world. She wanted nobody's pity, no questions that might make her blurt out her troubles.

Approaching the end of her narrative, she went over it and scratched out a few passages. She must not implicate certain Unionists who had helped her; she must protect several other sources. She worked without records, entirely from memory. So be it; she could only do her best. She felt stronger and calmer than she had in months. She was working for herself and Sam and for the Confederate side, telling the truth as she saw it.

Long before this Belle had heard the name of Augustus Sala, a well-known British journalist friendly to the South. On the same day she reread her last sheet of manuscript she sent a note: Would Mr. Sala please meet her at the Brunswick Hotel? Two days later, her manuscript in a box, she waited there for the editor.

As he took her material, she did not miss the slight misgiving in his face. How many others must have thrust such thick documents upon him? Mr. Sala was a skillful interviewer, however, and before Belle realized it, she had told him a great deal about her present situation. "You'll be hearing from me," he assured her as they parted.

Two days passed without word. Perhaps it had been a mistake, she thought, to approach so busy a man. Then the landlady puffed up the stairs, waving a paper. "Look, ma'am, the morning paper." She pointed to a long letter to the editor, telling of Belle's current difficulties—clearly the work of Mr. Sala.

Astonished and confused, the girl finished reading and faced the landlady. "I don't know what to think about this, or what to do. I've never had—" The doorbell rang and a messenger left an unsigned letter, enclosing a twenty-five-pound note. "From a Friend of the South, and of Belle Boyd's." Could she possibly take the money? She was embarrassed, and yet touched. . . .

That week and the next she learned over and over again how many people knew of her and admired her work; and she had no way of returning the contributions that accompanied many of the anonymous messages. So she used the funds, and gave new thanks in her prayers for the kindness of these people.

But her book . . . Mr. Sala must not have found it worth publication; had his letter to the paper been merely a kind substitute for the sort of assistance she had wished? One day, however, a vaguely familiar figure emerged from the fog of London, and he stood at her door.

Mr. Sala spoke before she could question him: "Mrs. Hardinge, we have an acceptance for your book, and from a very good publisher. A few places need clarifying, and you'll have to explain some American words, and . . ." Belle heard him over the frantic racing of her heart. Her world had begun to hold together again. Now if Sam could only be with her, sharing in this good fortune . . .

Then she saw Mr. Sala's look change, and he went on in a curiously subdued tone:

"There's something else. Mrs. Hardinge, a number of people have come to my office with requests to examine your manuscript. Several claim they're connected with the Union government. I paid them no heed until today." Mr. Sala's lips tightened. "One man says that if your book is *not* published, he promises that Mr. Hardinge will be released. If it comes out—well, anything may happen to your husband. Of course, I have no way to tell how authorized this individual is. . . ."

Unsteadily Belle got up. "I—I'll get in touch with you." For a long time she sat alone in her room. The threat might be a trick, of course; or it might mean nothing at all. But did she have the right to take a chance?

Several days passed and at last a desperate plan occurred to Belle. She would write Lincoln himself, reverse the offer and the threat made to the editor. If Sam were released to join her by the beginning of March, she would promise that her book would be suppressed; otherwise it would be published. At her desk she started determinedly. "24 Jan., 1865, Honorable Abraham Lincoln, President of the U. S. America . . ."

The days that followed were spent in numb waiting.

Time dragged by, and the winter appeared endless. Belle felt heavy in body and heart. Then at last there arrived a letter marked "Important." Belle ripped it open, and her eye caught the signature, "Sam." He was on his way to her now!

Long before Sam's vessel reached its berth at Liverpool, Belle stood behind the barrier at the dock. She had come alone; she would tell Sam of their child, of her book and her plans for a flat in London. However far it was from their real home, England would be their residence for an indefinite time.

During the last few days her calm had returned. Past problems could be forgotten and if new ones appeared she was ready for them. Sam would know the truth about the stories of the ever-weakening South—a truth that might be even worse than some of the London Confederates suspected. For that, too, she had prepared herself.

For nearly an hour Belle stood apart from the crowd that waited for the ship, protected by a ledge from the light snow that fell from a hidden sky. Then gradually the vessel's prow appeared through the white curtain. Her eyes searched the deck. Sam was not there, nor did he emerge later with the several dozen passengers who shoved down the gangplank.

Where could he be? Anxiously Belle started to ask one of the officers, when she saw a heavy figure move across the distant deck, supporting a white-faced young man. Before she could clearly make out the sharpened features, she realized that the sick man was her husband.

Belle lifted her hand in greeting. The smile that curved her lips was strained, but it had a semblance of gaiety when at last she reached out to him. As her hands caught Sam's, the big seaman who was helping him murmured something and withdrew.

"I'm sorry, Belle," Sam whispered, his voice very low. "Sorry to have you see me this way."

"There's nothing to be sorry about," she told him as she gave him a warm kiss. "You'll have to be careful for a while, that's all. From now on, things are going to be better, much better." While she spoke she promised it to herself with all her old self-assurance. After a word to the porter, Belle's arm went around Sam and she led him carefully down the gangplank and across the dock.

They walked slowly until Belle assisted Sam into the carriage and directed the porter in the disposition of his luggage. Now, for a while at least, she would have to make the decisions, and supply the strength to carry them out. In the swirling snow she stood with her head lowered for a moment; then she turned a bright, confident face to her husband.

# Finale

TODAY ANNUALLY at a simple grave in the serene setting of Wisconsin Dells, Wisconsin, men and women of North and South unite in memory of Belle Boyd. Several years ago in a ceremony believed to be the first of its kind to be held in America, representatives of the two sections gathered to honor the name and memory of the Southern agent. Since then each year sees the continuation of this unusual tribute.

Through Wisconsin waters near her grave there sails a small vessel bearing the name of *Belle Boyd*, and flying the Confederate colors. It is said to be the only craft in the world operating regularly under the Stars and Bars. Northern and Southern officials, representatives of the United Daughters of the Confederacy and other groups, joined in christening the vessel.

Belle died of a heart attack in the Wisconsin town in early June of 1900, soon after her arrival there to make a talk. Her postwar years were crowded ones, sometimes happy, sometimes bitter. Sam Hardinge died not long after he joined her in London, apparently as a result of his wartime imprisonment. She went on the London stage to support her child, then started a stage career in America. She married again; after some years she divorced her husband and married a third time.

In these years Belle made hundreds of appearances as a lecturer on the war and its espionage. She became a favorite speaker in the North as well as in the South, and it was on one such speaking tour that she went to Wisconsin Dells.

A former Confederate soldier from Mississippi, passing her grave, decided it should have a marker, and he placed it there.

BELLE BOYD
CONFEDERATE SPY
BORN IN VIRGINIA
DIED IN WISCONSIN

ERECTED BY A COMRADE

